WAYS AND MEANS

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Flossie from

"Margery had kindled a cheery little wood fire on the library hearth, and coaxed Muriel into a deep reclining-chair in front of it." P. 24.

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WAYS AND MEANS.

BY

MARGARET VANDEGRIFT.

AUTHOR OF "DORIS AND THEODORA," "THE QUEEN'S BODY-GUARD," ETC., ETC.

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WAYS AND MEANS.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE.

"Some lose not only joy, but memory
Of how it felt; not love that was so dear
Lose only, but the steadfast certainty
That once they had it. Doubt comes on, then fear,
And after that, despondency."

—JEAN INGELOW.

IT was the evening of one of those beguiling February days which convince us that this year, at least, we are going to have an early spring. Two days of mild air and warm sunshine had swelled the buds on the ever-ready maples almost to bursting, had turned the bare willow-branches a golden yellow, and conjured up patches of astonishingly green grass. The grounds about a handsome, dignified-looking house in one of the charming suburbs of Boston were always in spotless, or rather flawless order, and now to this was added an indefinable aspect of glad expectancy, which neutralized the slight primness of their arrangement. The house was of dark-gray stone, with a high-pillared, square porch over the wide front door; a bay window, two stories high, on either side of the porch, and that modern abomination, a "French roof," doing all it could to dwarf the appearance of a large house. But, fortu-

nately, a little slope had been allowed this particular French roof, so that it did not glower over the eaves as if about to fall upon the first person daring enough to ring the bell, and three old-fashioned dormer windows did much to make it look easy and comfortable. Windows to the floor opened from the third story upon the roofs of the bay-windows, and a light iron railing rose above the stone coping sufficiently high to make these attractive little balconies reasonably safe for any one but the adventurous small boy, and it was many a long year since one of his tribe had been vouchsafed opportunities of adventure either within or immediately without those gray walls.

The sun had set, but a golden radiance, unbroken by the smallest cloud, still lingered in the west, so that the sickle of a very young moon shone pale, and almost invisible, by contrast, and the larger stars came out slowly, and with apparent reluctance.

Inside the house was a strange stillness—strange, in view of the fact that all the shutters were open, and that a few of the rooms showed signs of very recent occupation. Only a few. The majority, although very fully furnished, and arranged as if an occupant were momentarily expected, were too evidently "spare rooms." The wide front of the house, ample as it was, gave no idea of the number and size of the rooms within it. Very deep double back-buildings, only one story lower than the front part, afforded half the number of rooms contained in the four-storied square, which showed from the front gate. As the house faced west, one side of this back building had a southern exposure, and here were by far the most pleasant rooms, if the least stately. A small house, connected with the large one by a covered passage-way, had been built for the sleeping accommodation of the servants, and for the indispensable trunk-and-lumber rooms, so that every part of the mansion was

arranged as if for occupation by the owner and his family. This arrangement had been one of the many peculiarities which had marked, and too often marred, the life of the recent owner, Anthony Hardcastle. He had inherited the house, together with an ample fortune, when he was no longer a young man, and had married, soon after entering upon his inheritance, the woman who, for fifteen years, had been patiently waiting until he should consider himself able to support a wife. Whether or not he would ever have so considered himself, but for this unlooked-for stroke of good fortune, many people doubted. His proposal to Janet Gordon had been the one unguarded and unforseen action of his life, and had scarcely been made when his native caution re-asserted itself, and he offered to release her, upon the score of his poverty, and the length of the time which must, in all probability, elapse before he could marry her; but she, young, unsuspicious, and unhappily circumstanced, had considered this only a proof of his generosity and nobility, and had proudly declared that she would wait for him, if need be, until death, instead of marriage, put an end to the waiting. She had come to doubt, before her marriage, the wisdom of this decision, yet had not had the courage to break her engagement, and so had drifted on, from year to year, a poorly-paid, because not very efficient teacher, waiting, rather hopelessly, as years went by, for her release from a distasteful servitude. It came at last, when she was nearly forty years old, and she counted upon spending the rest of her life in tranquil contentment; all romantic ideas of happiness had long since vanished. But, if more actual sermons on the subject were needed, here was one more upon "the vanity of human wishes." The old affection between Anthony Hardcastle and his wife revived into almost youthful fervor, before the birth of their child; one thing alone filled Janet with grave apprehension;

her husband spoke always, and with serene confidence, of "the boy;" and when a little wailing baby-girl was at last laid in his arms by the grave-faced nurse, the look upon his face was one never to be forgotten by his sorrowful wife. It was just before the birth of this poor little unwelcome daughter, that the house had been remodeled to suit the fancy of the new owner, and in every change he had some reference to the future life and prospects of "the boy."

He was never actively unkind to his patient and spiritless wife, and as time went on he provided without remonstrance or hesitation for the wants and then for the wishes of his only child, but he saw her as little as was at all possible without exciting remark from servants and outsiders, and was greatly relieved when at an early age she made a perfectly suitable and proper marriage. Then, once more, his hope of an heir revived and once more crushing disappointment extinguished that hope. His daughter, who from a sickly child had grown into a delicate and fragile woman, returned to her home a widow, with a little daughter of her own two years after her marriage, and when the little Muriel was five years old, her mother's long expected death left her solely to the care of her grandparents. And then occurred a curious thing. "Old Mr. Hardcastle," as every one called him by this time, who had, as nearly as might be, ignored his daughter and her child, began suddenly to notice Muriel. Stuart Douglas, her father, had been a handsome man, in robust health up to the time of his sudden death, and she seemed to have inherited his strength and activity, instead of the frail constitution of her mother. The heavy, silent atmosphere of the house had apparently no effect upon her, and as she grew larger her grandmother trembled day by day at her increasing noisiness and general troublesomeness, dreading the sharp, cold reproof upon this subject, which fell to her lot upon too many others. Her

terror culminated upon the evening when Muriel, escaping suddenly from the hands of Margery, her Scotch nurse, made a successful dash for the door which separated the back building from the front part of the house, and before her breathless pursuers could lay hands upon her, had "ridden" down the massive mahogany rail of the balusters, and landed, a laughing, screaming heap of red flannel and bright curls on the thick fur rug which, most fortunately, lay at the foot of the stairs; for, to add to her grandmother's horror, she was simply, if warmly, clad in her flannel night-gown when she made her escape. The slamming of the entry door had brought Mr. Hardcastle from his library, and by the time that his wife and Margery had reached the foot of the stairs, he stood there regarding the culprit, for the first time in her short life with actual interest. Some long-silent chord of fun and adventure in his disappointed, contracted heart was suddenly touched, and he with difficulty repressed the laughter which, for the first time in many years, assailed him.

"Were you trying to break your neck, child?" he asked, grimly, at the same time raising her from the rug and holding her cautiously in his arms.

"No, grandpa, I was only trying to ride," answered the small sinner, audaciously, "and my horse was too slippery. And I'm Muriel; I'm not 'child!'"

The twinkle in Mr. Hardcastle's eyes made her perfectly fearless, and she did not see the frantic signs made to her by her grandmother and Margery.

"Very well, I'll try to remember," he said, in the same grim tones, but he drew her closer, and to the infinite astonishment of the two anxious spectators, carried her into the library and closed the door. At the end of an hour he rang the bell, demanded Margery's presence, and handed her charge back to her with the remark:

"You were not to blame, possibly, upon this occasion, but you can take it as a warning to be more careful of Miss Douglas in future!" An indignant rejoinder rose to the lips of the sorely-tried nurse, but she wisely repressed it, courtesied meekly and haled "Miss Douglas" off to her bed.

The child was glowing and sparkling with excitement, the cause of which she poured forth as Margery, mindful of bare feet and possible croup, carried her, heavy as she was, up the broad stair-case down which she had come with such startling suddenness and unexpected results an hour before.

"I'm never to do it again, Margery. I promised I wouldn't, honor bright! And I don't really want to—it wasn't as much fun as I thought it would be, because it didn't last a second, and oh, what *do* you think? Because I promised, I'm to have the biggest, highest rocking-horse grandpa can find, and then, if I'm very good, next summer I am to have a real, real little pony, all my own! Oh, Margery!"

"You needn't choke me, Miss Muriel," said Margery, crossly; "I'd rather you'd say you were sorry for the fright you gave you grandmamma and me, than all the hugging you can give me."

"Well, then, I am sorry, as sorry as I can be, when I'm so glad, Margery, dear!" and with this somewhat mixed apology, Margery was fain to content herself. She had nursed Muriel's mother nearly thirty years ago, and had lived in the house ever since, as maid and seamstress to Mrs. Hardcastle, until Mrs. Douglas returned; then once more as nurse, to Muriel, this time. She had come of a very respectable and fairly educated Scotch family, and, being both quick and observant, had long since lost all marked peculiarities of speech; a very sweet voice and

pleasant accent she would never lose. Her faithful service had been one of the few bright threads in the woof of Mrs. Hardcastle's colorless life, and her devotion to Muriel knew no bounds. Janet Gordon, herself, was of not very remote Scotch ancestry, and this made the affection between mistress and maid all the warmer.

From the day of Muriel's startling "ride," a curious friendship sprang up between the child and her grandfather; the very things which annoyed and distressed Mrs. Hardcastle—her fearless courage, her irrepressible love of fun, her readiness to be amused and led into all sorts of pranks, seemed to awaken the formal, silent old man to a new life, while, at the same time, his lasting regret that she was a girl held him back from any thing like tenderness; and Muriel, quick, as all children are, to discern the lack of it, accepted him as a comrade, a desirable friend, later, as a teacher and adviser, for he had read and thought much; but he never reached the inner shrine of that warm little heart, nor did her grandmother. Long repression had produced fretfulness, and the poor lady would have been much shocked, could she have known how Muriel, as the only person really and wholly in her power, was selected as the victim of this fretfulness. Only a very bright and sunny temperament could have withstood, as Muriel's withstood, the daily captious fault-finding about trifles, and complaint about nearly every thing which it fell to her lot to hear. Her mother had been a very quiet, gentle woman, speaking little, and shrinking from all attempts to discipline her only child; the memory of her own unhappy childhood was all too fresh, and she resolved that, if she might not positively contribute to Muriel's happiness, she would at least do so negatively. So it was no wonder that Muriel, as time went on, helping her fading memories with a portrait of her young mother's delicately-sweet face, enshrined that mother

in the most sacred corner of her heart, and magnified her own loss as she contrasted the dead mother with the living grandmother. Not that she in the least doubted the latter's affection for her; she only grieved that it manifested itself in so many painful and distressing ways. The dull stillness of the great house, the monotony of her daily life, could not fail to crush out much of the overflowing spirit of her childhood. Perhaps, had she been sent early to school, and allowed to form acquaintance and friendship with children of her own age, she might have held her own in this respect; but her grandmother, having seen school-life on its seamy side, spoke her views upon this subject more positively than she usually dared to utter them upon any thing, and Mr. Hardcastle did not care enough about the matter to resist her; so every day, from her eighth birthday to her fifteenth, Muriel studied, and recited, and practiced, quite alone, under the care of a highly recommended and nearly faultless governess. Then she was allowed to go for three years to a "finishing school," and here, it seemed to her, in the mimic world of school-room, play-ground, parlor and dormitory, her real life began. By this time, Mrs. Hardcastle considered, her mind and "manner" were sufficiently formed to resist vulgarizing influences. Competition would waken her to fresh effort, and there were advantages in the excellent school which had, fortunately, been recommended and selected, which could not be obtained, even with the best teachers, at home. In looking back upon her life, Muriel always felt a thrill of thankfulness for the influence which the principal of this school exercised, almost without an exception, over her scholars. She was a woman of unusual mind and character; her "reason firm and temperate will" made themselves felt in every department of the large school which she governed, and she had one of the governing faculties—clear insight

as to character. Much as she was loved, she was also slightly feared, by all whose intentions were not of the most true and upright, and Muriel, growing daily fonder of, and more reverent toward the governor of her small world, unconsciously tried to form her own character upon the model she so admired; and Mrs. Willis, seeing, as she could not fail to see, the bent of Muriel's mind, and her strong tendency to hero-worship, tried to lead her pupil on to the heights where only a Heavenly Exemplar seems worthy to be imitated.

It was at this school that Muriel began, for the first time in her life, to make friends. At first, her shy, stiff manner put her at a painful disadvantage; she was considered "proud," and this idea was fostered by the unwisely rich clothing with which her grand-parents had provided her. She was not long in seeing the difference between herself and the other girls, in this respect, but the effect was entirely an opposite one from that which would have been produced upon many girls. A great dread that she was supposed to be "showing off" took possession of her; she ripped trimmings away with a reckless hand, hid in her trunk the most plainly unsuitable of her garments, and wrote pleadingly to her grandmother for some "quiet," inexpensive gowns, which would not render her conspicuous. It was owing solely to Mr. Hardcastle's very positive intervention, that her request was gratified, but before its results arrived, her comrades were beginning to revise their hastily-formed opinions of her. The life of utter seclusion, which she had heretofore led, had saved her from all arrogance concerning the wealth and standing of her family. Neither of her grandparents was in the least purse-proud, and although, she had always been amply supplied with pocket-money, she had also been supplied with every thing necessary to her daily living, and often the coming of one

month's allowance found that of the previous month almost untouched. She was not naturally ungenerous, but her pity and sympathy had been appealed to so seldom, that they were dormant, and, even after her life was broadened by the change from home to school, things remained much the same, in this respect, for a good while. Then, as Mrs. Willis divined more and more the life which had cramped, and well-nigh dwarfed, Muriel's mind and heart for so many years, she began quietly to draw out the feelings which she hoped to find had been merely repressed and not utterly stifled. She knew that Muriel was to inherit her grandfather's very large fortune ; this Mrs. Hardcastle had mentioned, when she placed Muriel at the school, having a dimly defined idea that a knowledge of this important fact would secure consideration, if not privilege, for her grandchild, above that shown to her comrades. In this she was totally mistaken ; it was one of the chief aims of Mrs. Willis's daily life to give her girls a standard of judgment quite unbiased by such considerations as this, and, being very much in earnest, she was, in the main, successful. A suspicion that Muriel was purse-proud had been the cause of her unpopularity for some few weeks after she entered the school, and as her shyness increased with the knowledge that she was not liked, it seemed as if the fate of isolation, which she had so fervently hoped to escape when she left her lonely home, was pursuing her even into the midst of the throng which now surrounded her. She was intensely miserable while this lasted, and even home-sick, for her grandfather had made her more and more his comrade intellectually, as she grew older, and her mind expanded, and she missed even his cold and limited sympathy. But, as time went on, the prospect brightened. The more observant among the girls soon decided that no one with Muriel's face and manner could be really "proud." Her eager ac-

ceptance of the least proffer of friendliness confirmed this decision, and the change in her dress was not without its effect. Mrs. Willis encouraged acquaintance between her day-scholars and boarders, and allowed the exchange of visits when it did not interfere with school duties, and in this way, more than in any other, Muriel's shyness gradually wore off, and the joyous, hopeful nature, which was her birthright, began to assert itself. But it grieved Mrs. Willis to see how, after every vacation, much of this work of expansion must be done over again, for these vacations, passed, as they always were, in the silence and seclusion of that unhomelike home, undid the good work of her school-life, in very large measure. One change, however, made such sturdy growth that it resisted the dwarfing influence. She had been awakened to the power of good which lay in rightly-spent money, and her vacations, with Margery for a willing helper, began to be brightened with the blessedness of giving. Margery's escape from the stifling quiet of the house had been a general friendliness with the maids of neighboring houses, and with all the "butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers" whose business brought them within her ken. She was no scandal-monger, but it could not be denied that she loved a good gossip, which her kindly nature and keen sense of humor saved from any harmful tendency. Piloted by her, Muriel began to make adventurous little voyages into other people's lives, vainly attempting, as she did so, to take with her at least the interest and sympathy of her grandparents. And here, once more, her grandfather came to her rescue. Mrs. Hardcastle, in the very beginning of this new departure, tried to put a stop to the proceedings; she was sure that Muriel would be imposed upon; that she would run risks of catching "all sorts of dreadful diseases;" that contact with "such people" would "hopelessly vulgarize" her. Mr.

Hardcastle summoned Margery to one of the rare interviews which always filled that good woman with awe; he questioned her closely, charged her strictly, and dismissed her from the library to make room for his wife, who, dreading reproof for some unconscious dereliction, was greatly relieved to find that she was only to receive a fresh command.

"You will oblige me, Janet," said her husband, coldly, "by not interfering with Muriel's disposition of her allowance. She will one day have a large fortune at her disposal, and unwise restrictions laid upon her now will make her a spendthrift when the opportunity arrives. I have given Margery instructions which will, I think, sufficiently guard and protect Muriel, and you will please understand that the matter is settled."

It was—so far as actual restraint was concerned, but poor Mrs. Hardcastle, irritated by the iron hand from which the velvet glove had long since dropped, could not, or did not refrain from harassing Muriel with dismal prophecies and dire forebodings as to the effect of "indiscriminate almsgivings," so that what promised to be a deep and heartfelt pleasure, was too often turned into actual pain. The pleasure revived, however, with her returns to school, for Mrs. Willis never lost an opportunity to interest her girls in whatever good work was going on in the large town, in one of the suburbs of which her school was situated, and Muriel, confiding more and more in the love and sound judgment of this true friend, gained fresh opportunities for helping and sympathizing.

There had never been the slightest religious influence in her home since her young mother's death. Mrs. Douglas had been a real, if a very timid, Christian, and young as Muriel was at the time of her mother's death, she could remember the prayer she had been taught, and the beautiful

patience and forbearance of her mother's character. Mr and Mrs. Hardcastle were members of a wealthy congregation, and the former gave with tolerable liberality to the various charities under its charge, but neither professed an interest which they did not feel. Muriel was regularly taken to church, and her grandmother sometimes set her a Sunday task of hymn or Bible verses, and that was all. Margery was a staunch and bigoted "kirk" woman, and had been straitly charged by Mr. Hardcastle not to attempt to transmit her "views" on this subject to her nursling, so that Muriel's idea of religion, until she had come under Mrs. Willis's care, had been that it was a somewhat irksome bondage, necessary to respectability, but otherwise not to be desired. The warm, vital faith which governed every province of Mrs. Willis's life, surprised and puzzled her, but the counteracting home influence swayed her away from it, time after time, just as its attraction had nearly asserted itself. Mrs. Willis watched the struggle with loving and prayerful interest, never refraining from the word in season, but carefully avoiding the mistake, made by too many good people, of invading the "sanctuary heart," which, in Muriel, was peculiarly shrinking and sensitive.

It was at the beginning of Muriel's last school-year that she was summoned to her grandmother's bedside. Mrs. Hardcastle had so long been ailing that even Margery suspected no immediate danger until the end was very near. Perhaps, had the poor lady felt any great desire for continued life in "this troublesome world," the desire would have worked its own fulfillment, but disappointment, repression and physical distress had done their work. A gradual weakening, happily without much pain; then a sudden failure of the tired heart, and she was gone.

She had recognized Muriel with a faint smile, and an eager embrace, and with the recollection of this the poor

child tried to be as sorry as she blamed herself for not being. That curious change which sometimes follows death, stamped a beauty and dignity upon the poor, pale face, which, to Muriel, were startlingly new ; to Mr. Hardcastle were a reproach so bitter that his grief surprised himself fully as much as it did his household. He saw once more the girlish face which had caught his fancy, and surprised him out of his prudence. He recalled the happy, confiding belief in him which had marked the first year of their engagement ; then the gradual change to weariness and sadness, as he still failed, year by year, to deliver her from her bondage; then the brief glow of revived love and youthful happiness, and then—he groaned in bitterness of spirit as he remembered how that had ended; how his unreasonable anger and disappointment had developed into the still more unreasonable severity which had gradually warped their daily life out of all beauty and comeliness. If the dead could return to life after the work of the Great Revealer has been wrought, would the lesson, one often wonders, be acted upon? There is no reason to believe that it would.

Muriel was touched to the heart by her grandfather's stricken face, and urged him, in all sincerity, to allow her to remain with him for the present, even should he wish her to make up later the time taken from her last school year. But to this he would not listen. His grief produced no added tenderness toward his grandchild ; indeed, in his efforts to conceal it and to appear as usual, his manner became even more cold and indifferent than it had been, and it was with a thrill of thankfulness for which she bitterly reproached herself, that she made ready to return to her beloved school.

This was late in the winter. During the two weeks' holiday at Easter there was a slight change. He seemed to like to

have her with him ; he talked to her more freely than he had ever before talked about her prospects as heiress of his house and large fortune, and although he immediately and finally vetoed her timid suggestion that certain of her relatives were entitled to some part of the latter, he was not angry with her for making it, and even took great pains to convince her that he was acting in the matter after a full consideration of all the circumstances. He had never encouraged her in any intimacy with the relatives in question. Formal calls, and still more formal dinners and tea drinkings, had limited her acquaintance with them. Her mother's three aunts, the Misses Sabina, Clarissa and Jessie Gordon and their brother, Arthur Gordon, had been inclined to assert their relationship to and interest in Muriel, and perhaps had she found them very attractive, she might have succeeded in influencing her grandfather to allow her more intimacy with them ; but the two older Misses Gordon were elderly, formal women, who had long since forgotten their own youth, and ceased to tolerate that of any one else, and their step-sister and brother, Jessie and Arthur, although many years younger, and in some respects more attractive, had chilled Muriel's slight overtures of friendship by a tendency to ridicule her youthful beliefs and enthusiasms. Her cousins, Kate and Julia Hardcastle, daughters of a younger brother of her grandfather's, were lively, fashionable girls, well educated, but considering themselves "finished" while she was still at school ; and, while very ready to be friendly with her, voting her, between themselves, "tiresome." Their father's and mother's very comfortable circumstances kept them from any thing but an occasional passing feeling of envy toward Muriel; it would be "so nice," they agreed, to have money quite in their own right and without any parental strictures or restrictions, but while all their real and most of their fancied wants were

gratified, they did not think it worth while to be openly jealous of Muriel; it would do no good; of that they were well persuaded, for their uncle was notorious for his dogged determination in all his purposes, and when she did "come into" her fortune, and that handsome, if stiff and formal looking home, she would be worth claiming as a cousin and friend. Muriel liked them very well. Their lively talk amused her and they dressed with admirable good taste. One other cousin, her father's niece, May Douglas, she would love, she thought, if she might only have the chance. This May Douglas was also an orphan, within a year of Muriel's age. She lived with her aunt, Miss Agnes Forsythe, in a small, old-fashioned house in a quiet quarter of the city. Miss Forsythe was book-keeper in a large millinery establishment, and May taught in the excellent private school in which she had been educated. She had just begun teaching when Muriel entered upon her last school year, and though the girls met but seldom, a warm liking existed between them, ready to ripen into a still warmer feeling should the opportunity occur.

Knowing, as she did know, how useless it would be to suggest that even a small legacy would be a great assistance to May Douglas, Muriel resisted the temptation to speak of it, but she sometimes found herself evolving plans for bestowing comforts and luxuries upon May, in such a manner that they could not possibly be refused, and then blushed to think that the plans which gave her so much satisfaction were dependent, for their carrying out, upon her grandfather's death. But then, she reasoned, was he not himself continually speaking of the time when she would be the owner of his house and money? And had he not urged her to prepare herself for that time and not "let her head be turned" when it should come? "If my brother had a son," he said to her one day, after one of these talks, "I

should leave you merely a comfortable maintenance, and the house with the bulk of the fortune to him. As it is, I elect you, rather than Julia or Kate, for my heir, because you have more sense and a better education than both of them put together, and I think I can trust you not to squander the money or make a public fool of yourself. But of one thing I must strongly warn you. As soon as the amount of your fortune, which is more, I can tell you, than you imagine, becomes known, you will have no lack of so-called lovers, and I would willingly wager the whole of it that, out of them all, not one would keep his place were you suddenly to become penniless. Not that you are ill-looking, or at all to be despised, Muriel, but simply that, at the present day, money is the chief if not the only consideration, and while, no doubt many of your suitors will honestly believe themselves in love with you, they will be unconsciously influenced by the thought of your money, while others less fastidious will not attempt to hide from themselves at least their real motive in seeking you."

This bitter and cynical talk was not without its effect upon Muriel, both at the time when it was uttered, and long afterward, but Mrs. Willis's wholesome influence did much to counteract the mischief, and, in the absorbing occupation of her last year at school, it was, for a time, entirely forgotten. She graduated with honor, but it was with a curious feeling of dismay that she bade good-by to Mrs. Willis and her schoolmates, to return to the large, silent house, and the life which seemed, at each fresh resumption of it, more completely to hedge her in. She had intended writing to her grandfather, and asking permission to bring home with her the girl with whom, for some time past, she had been most intimate, Lena Fairfax, whose home was in a distant city, but her courage had failed in the matter, and the friends parted only with a general hope of some day

meeting again, and ardent promises to "write very often" in the mean time.

The summer dragged slowly by. Muriel added gardening to her other occupations, but she was still feeling languid with the reaction from that exciting "last year," and all she did seemed objectless and futile. Even her pensioners no longer interested her as they had done at first, and although she faithfully followed up Margery's information and suggestions, it was in a dull and spiritless fashion of which she was herself ashamed.

She longed unspeakably for a thorough change—for the free, open country, the mountains, the sea, but when she ventured to suggest to her grandfather that they should "go somewhere," if only for a few weeks, his cold and decided negative to the proposal made her wonder at her own daring.

"You will find no more healthful location than that of this house," he added, "so it must be merely a foolish restlessness and desire for novelty which prompts you to make this proposal, but I can assure you that no summer resort, however luxurious, can afford you the comforts of such a home as this, and I should advise you to occupy your mind with reading and study, and then you will find less time for discontent and idle wishes."

It was impossible for her to say more on the subject, after this, and Margery's openly-expressed pity and sympathy did harm rather than good. Muriel was beginning to pose to herself as a martyr, and to exaggerate, rather than courageously face, the disagreeables of her daily life.

About the middle of the summer Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle and their daughters returned home for a few days, in transit from sea-shore to mountains, and Mr. Hardcastle, who was a fussy, good-natured little man, was seized with a fit of righteous indignation that Muriel should be "mewed

up" all summer with no companion save her grandfather, and he made a determined attack upon his brother in her behalf, and, unfortunately, in her presence also. She saw the unusual look of hurt feeling which swept across her grandfather's face as his brother, in a few and plain words, "freed his mind," and asked that Muriel might be allowed to come with them for the rest of the summer.

"I am an old man," said the elder Mr. Hardcastle, slowly; "I do not think I shall require any thing of Muriel much longer, but she is at liberty to go with you, Andrew, if she chooses to do so."

"Do you really care—would you really miss me, grandpapa?" asked Muriel, eagerly.

"Yes," he said, slowly, "I should miss you—because I am used to seeing and hearing you about the house, but I do not actually need you, Muriel; the servants are used to attending to my physical comfort. Go, if you wish to go."

Muriel wavered; six weeks of freedom and fun with those gay, laughter-loving cousins, and their too-indulgent father and mother, placed side by side with six weeks of stagnation and hopeless dulness in that silent house, presented a contrast so brilliant, so captivating, that her uncle had nearly won his cause, when, looking once more, and with unwonted keenness, at her grandfather to try to discover his real feeling about the matter, she noticed how rapidly he had failed since his wife's death. His thin hair had grown perfectly white; his cheeks were hollow and pale, and his dim eyes somehow, for the first time, impressed her as having grown more dim from secretly shed tears.

"I will not leave you, grandpapa!" she cried, crossing the room, and taking his trembling hand between her warm, strong ones. "I did not know you would care, but I am so glad to find you would, that I shall not mind in the least!

Thank you, very, very much, uncle, and please thank aunt and the girls for wanting me, but I can not go ! "

" And really, Matilda," said the younger Mr. Hardcastle, when he told the result of the interview to his wife, " what troubles me most is the uselessness of the sacrifice. Anthony might as well have been a stone post, for all the gratitude he expressed for that dear, warm-hearted little thing's sacrifice. It provokes me whenever I think of it ! "

But to Muriel, the quick, clinging pressure of her grandfather's hand contradicted his impassive face ; she was satisfied, even then, and far more than satisfied, when, a few months later, she found that he had at that very time been suffering with disease which he knew to be incurable. He died early in the following February, and the last few days of his life obliterated, for the time being, the memory of much that had gone before. He slept a good deal of the time, but whenever he was awake, he seemed uneasy and distressed if she were not present, and pleased when she held his hand, or gently stroked his face. He was too weak for any connected talk, but a look of distress often crossed his face, and once she heard him murmur :

" Treasure in Heaven ! If I had only a little, little more time ! "

And another time, when she was bathing his face, he looked at her appealingly, and said :

" *You'll* lay it up there, Muriel ? And who knows, perhaps—no, no, it will not be credited to me. ' Whatsoever a man soweth——' "

And while Muriel struggled agonizingly with her shyness, and a sense of her utter unfitness to speak upon such subjects, he fell into the uneasy sleep from which she dared not wake him. He had listened politely to the brief words of exhortation and prayer offered by the clergyman of his parish, who called two or three times during his illness, but

it distressed Muriel beyond measure to see that he looked upon the visits as a mere matter of form, and seemed to attach no meaning to the words. But on the night of his death, as she sat patiently by his bedside, holding his cold hand, and speaking gently to him whenever he seemed to be awake, he suddenly opened his eyes and gazed earnestly at her, and said, in a clear, firm voice:

"I am sorry!"

Conquering herself by a violent effort, she answered:

"That is all God asks, Grandpa. He will forgive you."

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the old man, in failing tones, and before Muriel could call the nurse, he was gone.

And now the funeral was over. The clear, business-like will had been read, and Muriel, with an over-burdened, too-responsible feeling, understood that she was mistress of an income which, under any circumstances, would reach thirty thousand dollars a year, and might, with careful management, far exceed that sum.

Mr. Hardcastle had invested in real estate which was daily rising in value; and in stocks and bonds of the safer kind, and his lawyer explained and expounded to Muriel, until it seemed to her that the effort to understand had fairly benumbed her brain.

She had very quietly, but very firmly, resisted the efforts made by her relatives to induce her to stay with them, and close the house, "at least for the present." It seemed to her that, if she might not have peace and silence, and a chance to settle matters with herself, she should lose her reason. And at last they left her, making characteristic comments on the strangeness of her behavior as they went. She had assured her Aunt Matilda, who had been the most pertinacious, and difficult to escape of them all, that she would send for a companion, should she feel the need of

one, and that Margery should, for the present, sleep in a room adjoining her own.

The funeral and reading of the will had taken place in the morning, but it was three o'clock before she was left alone. Margery had kindled a cheery little wood-fire on the library hearth, and coaxed Muriel into a deep reclining-chair in front of it, hovering about the room, in her loving anxiety, until Muriel could bear it no longer, and gently dismissed her.

And then it seemed to the overwrought girl that the battle really began. Despite her recent loss of rest, she felt as if she should never sleep again, and the days of her life marshaled themselves past, in bewildering procession. Had it been, after all, she wondered, her own fault that her life was such a loveless one? Might she not, if she had sooner showed tenderness and feeling, have awakened them in her grandparents? No—although in her present frame of mind it would have comforted her to heap reproaches upon herself, she recalled, against her will, the manner in which all her childish advances had been met, until, almost unconsciously to herself, they had ceased. She found herself even doubting the affection which her grandfather had recently seemed to feel for her.

"It was only because he was dying and felt afraid, and had no one else to turn to!" she said to herself, bitterly. "If he had recovered from this illness, he would have been cold, and stern and cynical again. He has never really loved me. Nobody has ever loved me. Oh, what hateful, hateful thoughts, when—but why should I thank him for leaving it all to me, when he could not take it with him? It is like a millstone round my neck already—I should be far, far happier if I had to work as May and Miss Forsythe work. Suppose I should grow like him, valuing money just for it's own sake? And I don't know how to spend it

rightly! I must give account of it; it is crushing me even now. Oh, I thought I wanted to be alone, but this is worst of all, worst of all!"

She rushed to the writing-table, and, controlling with difficulty her repugnance to disturbing its arrangement—it was just as her grandfather had left it—she found pen and paper, and wrote a hasty note.

DEAR MAY:—Can you come and stay with me to-night? Come at once, if you can. I am all alone. I am very lonely. Yours, MURIEL.

She would not wait to write more to explain. She could do that after May came, for she felt no doubt as to the response to this appeal; and her faith was justified. Neither Miss Forsythe nor May had been at the funeral; the hour at which it took place made the attendance of either impossible, and May, longing to offer sympathy, yet fearing to intrude, should she go too soon, waited only to read the note, and obtain her aunt's hearty sanction, and then hastened to Muriel.

CHAPTER II.

SEEKING A CLUE.

" I do not know the use or name
Of that I spin ;
I only know that Some One came
And laid within
My hand the thread, and said, 'Since you
Are blind, but one thing you can do.' "
—H. H. JACKSON.

THE cousins met in perfect silence, but when Muriel felt the warm pressure of May's arms, the soft touch of her cheek, the whirl of bewildering thought seemed suddenly to stop, and tears came instead. May drew her down on the lounge, and held her fast, murmuring loving words, but making no attempt to stop those healing tears. And somehow Muriel felt a sense of perfect safety ; had it been possible for her to cry before any other member of the family, she would have felt that she must explain, or be branded as a hypocrite, for no one had ever suspected Anthony Hardcastle of the least tenderness of feeling. But when, after sobbing a few minutes, she gasped :

" Oh, it's all so miserable, so miserable ! " May answered quietly.

" I know what you mean, dear," and Muriel cried on till she could cry no more. Then May "settled" her on the lounge, as tenderly as a mother could have done it, made up the sinking fire, lighted the reading-lamp and drew the

curtains, for daylight was fading by this time, and she did not mean Muriel to have any twilight to-night.

Muriel watched her as she moved deftly about the room, with an indescribable sense of rest and comfort, and when, having succeeded in making it cosy and cheerful, May said:

"I wonder if Margery would let us have our tea here, to-night?"

Muriel eagerly caught at the suggestion. May had guessed, from Muriel's wan face and trembling hands, that the latter had eaten little or nothing that day, so, when Margery came, in answer to her ring, so promptly as to show that she had staid as near her child as she dared stay, May said pleasantly:

"Will you let us have our tea here to-night, Margery, and let me mention that I had only a rather light lunch to-day?"

Margery bestowed a beaming smile of gratitude on May, and then hurried to the kitchen to give private instructions to the cook, returning to spread a tray with daintiest napery, and glass and silver, so that, when Muriel found herself seated at the little round table which Margery noiselessly brought in, she also found that she was faint with hunger, and ate enough to satisfy both her loving watchers, anxious as they were. Then May coaxed her back to the lounge, establishing herself near it in the easy-chair, and for awhile they watched the fire in that restful silence which can only exist between true friends. It was Muriel who spoke first.

"It is dreadfully humiliating, May," she said, with a little sigh, "to discover that much which we attribute to our minds and hearts is almost entirely physical!"

May saw at once what she meant. The change in her expression, since she had been strengthened with food and rest, made the remark quite intelligible.

"No, I don't think it's exactly humiliating," said May, thoughtfully; "it's rather suggestive, though, it seems to me."

"Suggestive?" Muriel raised her head with a quick look of interest. She had often wished for a "good talk" with May.

"Yes. You know that verse—I can't remember the exact words—about, saying, 'depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' when we aren't doing any thing toward it? It seems to me reformers take hold of the blade, instead of the handle often. If we want the unpeaceful people to 'depart in peace,' we must do all we can to make it possible. And when we feel ourselves as you are feeling now, the difference that it makes, when we take the right sort of care of our 'vile bodies,' it brings it home to us as nothing else could. And Muriel, I don't think one should be unjust, or cruel to one's self any more than to any one else. I may be wrong—of course, I do not know all about it, nobody *can* know all about any thing,—but it seems to me that, even if you really have any thing on your mind left over from the past, about which you might reproach yourself, you'd better try to forget it. I often think of that text—'Thy sins, and thy iniquities will I *remember no more*.' I know that it isn't the way we forgive each other usually, but what a comfort it is to think that it is God's way of forgiving! I don't mean that we should forget to be really deeply sorry—to be careful about doing the same thing again; but that's different, isn't it, from brooding and worrying over a thing until we unfit ourselves for the next thing? There is so much to do and so little time, for each of us, in which to do it."

"Yes, I suppose that's all true; it must be true; and it makes me think of something Mrs. Willis said. She used to read to us in French twice a week, and we took turns in

giving her the English of as much as we could understand, and one day she caught my eye and laughed a little; I used to sit in a sort of petrified state, all but my ears, and when it was over, I would actuall be out of breath! She so often seemed to guess our thoughts, and that day she said: 'There is only one way Muriel; do not puzzle over what I have said; give your mind to what I am saying.' And afterward, when we were alone, she said there was a 'moral' —that sins repented of, and as we humbly trusted, forgiven, should be resolutely forgotten, too. And she quoted that hymn:

'Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?'

"And I thought how beautiful it was, and that I should always remember it, and now, when I need it, it's all—"

Her voice broke into a little quivering sigh, but presently she spoke again:

"We've wandered off from what we began with. If it's really true, as the Autocrat says, that a great deal that is labeled 'Theology,' should be labeled 'Piecrust,' where is the use in—any thing? If our bodies, and not our minds and souls, are the governing-power, we may just as well give up first as last, and be as comfortable as we can!"

"You don't think that, Muriel—I know you don't! But I'll own that the same temptation has attacked me, over and over again, and it is only lately that I have settled myself about it."

"And how did you settle yourself, tell me?"

And in her eagerness, Muriel sat up and grasped May's hand. May gently pulled her down again, but kept her hand, as she said:

"I can't put it into good words; I never can say things exactly as I think them, but it was something like this—at first, our bodies really do have the upper hand; when we are

babies, and very little children, we cry out if we are hurt, and laugh when we 'feel good,' and then as we grow older, we find that it doesn't always answer to cry and laugh with every passing feeling—that we must have some regard for the feelings of other people. That is a great step. But very often I think we stick fast on the next level; we repress the crying and laughing, but we take it out in other ways. But, if we keep on up, after awhile we begin to find that the soul and mind *can* conquer; if they couldn't, how could the martyrs ever have borne their martyrdom? I don't know whether it's wrong or not, but sometimes I really think, Muriel, that some of them—the ones who had climbed, and been lifted, highest, didn't feel the pain at all! What first put that in my mind, was something that happened to us—to aunty and me. My apron caught fire, and she crushed out the flames with her bare hands, and actually didn't know she had burned them, till she took hold of something and found that each hand was a great blister. You see, she was so frightened about me that she never felt the fire. And if human love can lift a person up so high, it seems to me that Divine Love—"

She paused, as if she could not find fitting words for her thoughts.

Muriel had listened with an intent face. "That's beautiful!" she said, when she found that May was not going to finish her sentence. "I wonder if Tennyson's thought was any thing like that, when he said:

'That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves, to higher things.'

"But May, I haven't any right to any of it. You know I've never—I've always thought I'd better wait, and be sure; I was so afraid of bringing reproach, and things never seemed quite clear."

Muriel wondered, afterward, how May had understood

this incoherent sentence. But she did, as her answer evidenced.

"I wouldn't wait any longer if I were you, Muriel," she said, with tender earnestness. "It will only grow harder, I think. And it seems to me that you'll need *so much* help now! And don't you think its the worst 'reproach' any body can bring, to stand utterly outside—to refuse allegiance, as if we thought we knew a better way?"

"Oh! I never meant it that way, never!" Muriel's face showed how much the suggestion shocked her.

"No, I don't suppose any body quite means that," said May; "but isn't that what it amounts to, after all? If we enroll ourselves 'under Christ's banner,' at least, we show that we believe His is the strongest power—that we want to belong to Him."

"I wish I could see things as clearly as you can, May," said Muriel, with a perplexed, troubled look on her face, which made May stoop to kiss her.

The striking of the hall-clock startled them both.

"Eleven," said May, springing up, "and I must be at home at half-past seven to-morrow, and at school by half-past eight. How thoughtless I've been; you should have been in bed an hour ago, you poor, tired child!"

"No, I've been resting a great deal better than I should have rested if I'd gone to bed early, but I ought to have remembered about you; you'll not have half enough sleep I'm afraid. I *wish* you didn't have to go to that school!"

"So do I, once in a while, but only once in a while. I like it too well really to wish to give it up."

"You'll come back again to-morrow afternoon? Miss Agnes will lend you to me for one more night!"

"Yes indeed—for two or three more, if you like—we always ask Miss Post to come and 'substitute,' when either of us wishes to go away for a night, and she seems to like it;

she counts it as 'visiting,' and it's such a comfort to have her."

"Miss Post?" said Muriel, inquiringly.

"Oh, I forgot—you don't know who she is, of course. She's such a nice old lady, with not a single relation, not even a cousin, in the world. She 'keeps room' near our house, and takes in sewing and fancy work, and she has rheumatism in her arm half the time, but she's the cheerfulest soul—come, Muriel, we must go to bed! If I begin to talk about Miss Post, I shall keep us both awake all night; she's one of my specialties."

Margery's anxious face at the door emphasized May's exhortation.

"My bairn," she said, with an unconscious lapse of both speech and accent, "you're in sair need of sleep;" and she glanced somewhat reproachfully at May.

"We're coming right away, Margery," said Muriel, meekly, "and May, the front room is all ready, if you'd rather sleepthere; but if you don't mind, I wish you'd sleep with me."

May answered with a kiss. And that night, for the first time in many days and nights, Muriel slept soundly and sweetly, and woke refreshed.

It seemed to her such a very few minutes since she fell asleep, that she was astonished when Margery, stealing in for the fifth or sixth time that morning to see if her "bairn" had wakened yet, told her that May had been gone two hours or more. She let herself be coaxed to have her breakfast brought before she rose, and did not at all object to Margery's gentle "fussing."

"How many years is it since you washed my face for me, I wonder," she said, with a smile that gladdened her old nurse's heart. And all day, the tender cares which had the day before tortured her overwrought nerves, soothed and

comforted her, and helped her to wait patiently for May's return. The faithful love of the true-hearted old Scotch woman seemed to her more valuable now than it ever had seemed before; it stood between her and the world, which, looked at from this new point of view, appeared so large, so heartless, so totally uninterested in her and her concerns. It was not, however, the latter, as she was very soon to find. From the lawyer, who for many years had managed her grandfather's affairs, down to Margery herself, she was obliged to run the gauntlet of "judicious advice," until she ceased to wonder that the hunters of the "snark" had considered it a "rousing" agent. Her great-uncle, Andrew Hardcastle, and his wife, began by taking for granted that she would immediately close "that immense house," and either bestow herself upon the family of some one of her relatives, or board in a sufficiently select and sheltered "establishment."

Her three great aunts and their brother went even further than this; they said it would be a very bold and unladylike thing for a girl of Muriel's age to "set up for herself in that immense house; if she must needs stay there, she should at once provide herself with a proper chaperone." This, to tell the truth, Muriel had intended to do, not so much for propriety's sake, as because she found the loneliness and silence of the great house almost intolerable, but she felt that her choice must be no hasty and ill-advised affair, soon to be repented of; she did not fancy either horn of the dilemma in which a mistake about this matter would place her; continued association with a distasteful person, or the painful duty of dismissing the companion as if she were an unsatisfactory servant.

All the great aunts called upon her the day after the funeral, and all urged their views and opinions decidedly, if not eloquently, but Muriel would commit herself to nothing.

"May Douglas is kind enough to say that she will dine and sleep with me for at least the rest of this week," she answered to the various exhorters, "and I must have a little time for quiet thinking before I decide upon any thing."

"May Douglas!" said Miss Jessie to Miss Sabina, as they went dissatisfiedly home. "I've thought for some time that she was trying to work herself into Muriel's good graces. I suppose she thinks, now, that nothing would be more natural and proper than for Muriel to ask her and that prim aunt of her's to come and let the pleasure of their society offset their board! I've the greatest mind in the world to write Muriel a note and warn her to be careful how she commits herself; if she once takes them in, she'll never be rid of them."

"I don't suppose there is any use in warning *you*, Jessie," said Miss Sabina, sharply, "but you'll be neither more nor less than a fool if you set the girl against you by such barefaced meddling as that. She's not a child; she must be all of nineteen, and she has the Hardcastle jaw; if you once make an enemy of her, you'll not only cut off your own nose to spite your face, but you'll cut all of us off from a very desirable visiting place, for it's plain to me that she has no idea of closing the house. She enjoys her position of lady of the manor too much already to be willing to give it up. So, for your own sake, you'd better keep on friendly terms with her."

The discussion was renewed that evening in full family conclave. Sabina was apprehensive that Jessie's unguarded tongue might do them all a mischief with Muriel, and she wished to enlist Arthur, who alone seemed to have any influence over Jessie on the side of prudence. This was easily done. He considered any thing approaching a family quarrel unpardonably vulgar, and he spoke to Jessie with so much more decision and authority than he usually exhibited

under any provocation, that she gave the promise he desired, or rather demanded of her, positively, if somewhat sullenly, and with that they were all content. He was fond of Muriel, after his own fashion, although he had never quite forgiven her for being his great-niece. He was only her senior by about fifteen years, and the relationship had always seemed to him a sort of absurdity; the more, perhaps, because he had an annoying consciousness of appearing to be much older than he really was. He was slightly bald and very near-sighted, and, even when he was much younger, his face had not worn a youthful expression. An exaggerated self-consciousness had led him into an exaggerated idea of his own defects, and that curious sort of inverted vanity which sometimes makes very insignificant people uncomfortable with the idea that they are being closely watched and unkindly criticized. A really bright mind and a very fair amount of talent in two or three directions had been dwarfed and defeated by this unhappy temperament, so that now, at thirty-five years old, he was a bank clerk with a salary which fully supplied his wants, if not his wishes, and with no aspiration to be any thing more. His two elder step-sisters still spoke of and to Jessie and Arthur as if they were children, although Jessie was now about forty years old, and Arthur, as has been said, thirty-five. A certain sort of cross-grained affection held them together, although sometimes, when differences of opinion waxed warmer than usual, Arthur would talk vaguely of taking Jessie and leaving his half-sisters "for good." But there were other considerations besides family affection. The house they occupied was theirs collectively; a separation would necessitate either it's sale or an arrangement of money-matters which would greatly straighten all their resources. Each had a small income, which, living as they now lived, was amply sufficient, but which would pinch them

not a little should they separate. And so common sense stepped in, when other considerations failed, and kept them together. Miss Jessie had never been allowed to meddle with the housekeeping, and, fortunately for the general peace, had never wished to do so. She drew a little, and played a little, and read a good deal, and went out when she was invited "to suitable places." But her life was in reality more empty than that of her sisters, for they gave the whole of their minds to the housekeeping, which they regarded with never-varying interest, while Jessie did not seem to be particularly interested in any thing, and Muriel always had, when she was with her Aunt Jessie for any length of time, a sort of hopeless feeling that nothing was "worth while."

The visits of so-called condolence from the various members of the family, were almost more than Muriel could bear. It was too evident to her that all of them, without a single exception, really felt that she should be congratulated, rather than condoled with, and she knew that, should she express to any one of them the terrible sense of *aloneness*, which made her long for a return of the time which, in passing, had seemed so dreary and hard to endure, she would be considered a hypocrite.

Her uncle's wife and daughters were announced just as the Gordons were leaving, and she was obliged, with what poor patience she could muster, to listen to and answer arguments, or rather, perhaps, statements and entreaties, until her uncle's entrance really seemed a release. He had stopped on his way home from his place of business, not at all expecting to find his wife and daughters there, and he wisely decided to defer the talk which he had intended having with Muriel to a time when they two could be alone. Her flushed face and look of excited weariness touched him, and he was not long in finding a pretext for carrying off

his women folk. He was a kind-hearted, thoroughly well-meaning little man, and although, very probably, had he found Muriel alone, he would have wearied her quite as much as her aunt and cousins had done, she kissed him good-by with a fervor of affectionate gratitude which did not escape him, and which stood her in good stead within the hour.

"I do think," said Mrs. Hardcastle, as she took her husband's arm outside the door, "that these quiet, self-contained people, who don't say what they're going to do until they're driven to it, are a thousand times harder to manage than the talkative ones, who say so much that they don't mean half of it!"

"My dear Matilda," replied Mr. Hardcastle, "I really can't see that it comes within your province to 'manage' Muriel. If my brother had wished us to act as her guardians, nothing would have been easier than for him to say so, but he showed how entirely he trusted in her good sense and judgment, by leaving her that large property unconditionally. I can't blame her for wishing to stay independently in a home of her own, rather than take the uncomfortable position she must take, if she enters the home of any one else; but it will be highly necessary for her to provide herself immediately with a suitable companion, and this I shall advise her to do."

"Yes, that's the way *you'll* try to 'manage' her, papa!" said Julia, with a saucy little laugh. "Well, I hope you'll have better luck than the rest of her dear relatives have had! I do wish I could have heard what the Gordon sisterhood had been saying to her! They looked even more like three thunder clouds than they usually do—which is quite unnecessary."

"If I were Muriel," said Kate, "I should coax that nice little May Dougias and her aunt to come and live with me.

May is agreeable—I mean to cultivate her when I have a little more time—and the aunt seems a quiet, ladylike body, who would do very well to play propriety, and yet would not do it aggressively."

"They wouldn't be coaxed, if I know any thing about it," replied Julia. "They're the 'crust of bread and liberty' sort, and their home is cosy enough—much more agreeable than that mausoleum of poor uncle's. If Muriel stays there alone, she'll be a raving maniac in a week or so!"

"My dear Julia!" said Mrs. Hardcastle, plaintively, "I do wish you would break yourself of talking in that manner! It is really distressing to me!"

"Poor mamma!" said Julia, compassionately, "You shouldn't be so sensitive, dear."

"Well, all I have to say is, that I think Muriel has a right to judge for herself in this matter," said Mr. Hardcastle, as they entered the handsome, cheerful-looking house which did, indeed, by contrast, make the one they had just left seem tomb-like, "and now that you've all had your say, and she knows what you think, you'll be wiser and kinder, too, to let her alone."

"Dear me, papa, we're not perishing to have her here. I think we were very benevolent to ask her at all!" was Julia's parting shot, as she vanished up the broad stairway.

And, in their own fashion, they were; for her presence in the house would have made it necessary to observe the days of ceremonial mourning for their uncle much more strictly than they would consider it necessary to observe them without her. They intended, "of course," to wear black for three months, and to give up every thing but "very quiet" afternoon teas and walking-parties, but, as Lent had, by a happy coincidence, just begun, they were quite resigned to the dispensation, and expected to utilize it largely in improving their minds.

It seemed to Muriel's over-excited fancy that the very sound of May's voice, when she came with the gathering twilight, was soothing and comforting; and May, whose warm heart had gone out to Muriel as freely as it went out to every one whose sorrows she could share or lighten, was deeply gratified by the loving reception accorded her.

"I began to be afraid that something had happened to keep you from coming," said Muriel, as she removed May's bonnet and cloak, and drew her to a chair in front of the fire.

"Yes, I was sorry to be so late," replied May, "but I was detained after school by two unfortunates who had missed some of their lessons, and then I wanted to see aunty for a few minutes, and make sure that she was all right, and that Miss Post was there."

"And was she?"

"Yes; and jubilant over some sewing from a new customer, just as an old one had left her, and because her arm has been 'almost perfectly well' for a week! Aunty will read to her this evening, and she can sew nearly twice as fast, she says, when she is listening to reading, as she can when she is alone. Dear soul! I think she's about the happiest person I know. She's in a constant state of amazement at the number and choice quality of her friends and 'happenings,' and I'm in a constant state of amazement at her."

"Did you say she was a dressmaker?" inquired Muriel, abruptly.

"She likes plain sewing best," replied May, "because, as she says, 'there's so much less responsibility,' but she's a very good dressmaker, we think—aunty and I. She makes all our gowns, and it's amusing, and touching, too, to see how anxious she is to have them 'in the very latest style,' so that they may not look old-fashioned before they are worn out."

"Will you please ask her to come and speak with me about some work, as soon as she has finished what she is doing now?"

"Yes, indeed; I'll be delighted to do it. I think you'll like her sewing, and I know you'll like her. Are we to have our dinner here? How nice! It's so much cosier than that big dining-room, isn't it?"

"Yes; I can't stand that great empty room, just yet, anyhow. I always did like this one better than any in the house, and my very pleasantest memories of grandpapa are all here. I would apologize to any body but you, May, for the shabby meal I gave you last night. Grandpapa always liked dinner at one o'clock, but I think I shall prefer it at five or six, it seems to give one so much more time, somehow. So it is a 'real dinner' to-night, and I only hope you are hungry."

"I am, very; and I'm glad you know enough not to apologize! Aunty and I laugh sometimes over our regard for titles—we do in reality dine at half-past six, for she can't be sure of getting home in time for six o'clock dinner, and we neither of us can take the time for more than a lunch in the middle of the day, but we always call it supper, and finish with a cup of tea, by way of justifying ourselves!"

The very respectable old colored waiter, who had lived with Mr. Hardcastle since Muriel was a baby, had been noiselessly bringing in dinner while the girls talked; and arranging it on the round table at one end of the room, which, cosy as it undoubtedly was, by comparison with the dining-room, was by no means small. Margery had permitted Rogers to resume his duties this evening, but she hovered about the door in a manner which would have disturbed the nerves of any one less sedate than Rogers, and the dainty little dinner, to which the cousins were presently

summoned, was the result of a general consultation in which Muriel had had no share, beyond saying to Margery that she would like to have a dinner at six o'clock in the library, and on a table rather larger than the one on which tea had been served the night before.

The cook and housemaid had been "in the family" nearly as long as Rogers had. Mrs. Hardcastle had never taken any active interest in the housekeeping, and had left much of the ordering and arranging to Margery, under whose wise and liberal management the servants had been well content, and after Mrs. Hardcastle's death, her husband had voluntarily raised Margery's wages, and given her entire control of the household. It was most fortunate for Muriel, from one point of view, that the well-established routine did not need even daily supervision from her; she was a boarder, with the privileges of a householder. But, perhaps, had she been called upon to take the reins of government in earnest, and give some thought to the management of the house, she would have been saved a good many hours of loneliness and useless regret.

When dinner was over, the fire once more asserted its attraction, and Muriel, refusing May's entreaty that she should lie on the lounge, drew up a chair, and plunged at once into the talk for which she had been waiting all day.

"I have been assailed all over again by all the family, May," she said, "about staying here. They all seem to think that my intention to do so argues incipient, if not actual, insanity, and I'm quite anxious to hear whether or not you agree with them."

"No, I don't, at all," replied May, with consoling promptness, "and aunty doesn't, either. We were talking about it, in the few minutes I spent with her this afternoon, and she said she should think you very foolish if you consented, against your wishes, to turn yourself out of your home.

But then, if I tell you that much, perhaps I ought to tell you the rest. We've built a great many castles, aunty and I, about having a home large enough for us to entertain at least two or three people at a time. I fairly ache sometimes, to make friends with some of those poor, tired-looking girls in the shops, and the gentle-looking, sad-faced women one sees in the street-cars, carrying home great bundles of sewing. Just think what it would be to them to be taken, only for a few days or a week, out of their forlorn lodging and boarding-places into a real home, and given a pretty room to sleep in, and nice things to eat, and little *sprees* in the evenings! And what aunty said was that she never knew any body in all her life, who had fallen upon such an 'opportunity' as this lovely big house and your money have made for you."

"If one could only see just one side of a thing, and not the least glimpse of the other!" said Muriel, with a perplexed, anxious look in her eyes, "it seems to me that taking people that way, just for a little while, and then sending them back, would make it ten times worse for them by contrast. And then, no matter how much money one has, the limit is reached long, long before one comes to the last of the people who need help. And there's no telling where to begin. My head fairly whirls when I think of it."

"It is confusing," assented May, "but when I was a small child, I read a fairy story which made a lasting impression on my mind, and perhaps I can transfer it to yours. I don't remember the details at all, but the gist of it was, that a flock of fairy-geese was to be caught, and that the boy who had to catch them succeeded very well so long as he tried to catch the nearest one first, but whenever he reached beyond and overlooked that nearest one he utterly failed. It seems to apply to almost every thing in life, doesn't it? And if you take things up as they come to

you, one at a time, it will not seem so overwhelming, I think. It's only in Wonderland that people can take two or three days at once for warmth, or any thing else."

"Yes, I think I see what you mean, but somehow it doesn't help me. Just suppose now, for an instance, that I had as many visitors here as the house would hold, and I were to come upon somebody to whom such a visit would mean as much as it could mean—I couldn't ask any body to go away, and—"

"My dear, excuse me for interrupting you," said May, energetically, "but there is less than no use in supposes of that kind, and nobody is called upon to do more than she can do! I don't think any body who is in real earnest is ever put into a hole—there's a way out, and a way of finding it. I wish you'd let aunty come and talk to you. She has the clearest head, and the warmest heart of any one I know, and I am only muddling you more and more, instead of helping you!"

"No, you are not; you shall not say that! But I should be only too glad to let Miss Forsythe come and talk to me, if she would not think it too much trouble."

"She wouldn't! And I am so glad you have stood firm about giving up your home. And Muriel, do you mind my asking a question?"

"I mind your asking that question, very much indeed—you might know I should—but not any other."

"Thank you! Do you mean to stay here quite alone, or shall you try to find some one to live with you?"

Muriel was silent for several minutes. She was sorely tempted to pour out her heart, and let May know that if she and her aunt would come there to live, she, Muriel, would have courage for any thing. But somehow she felt that to give utterance to her wish would be a terrible mistake. A sturdy independence brightened May's honest

face, and had impressed itself on Muriel from the first moment of their meeting; and besides that, she knew from various small signs and tokens, that both Miss Forsythe and her niece dearly loved their small, old-fashioned home. So she repressed herself and merely said:

"I suppose it will be better for me to have some sort of companion for various reasons. But I dread the idea. I may stumble on some one who will make me perfectly wretched, and yet give me no excuse for sending her away!"

"Do you know the Raymonds?" inquired Marion, apropos of nothing, apparently.

"No! you must remember that I don't know any body! I never could summon courage to ask grandpapa's permission to invite any one to the house, not even the girls I liked best at school, and I could scarcely be more, not only friendless, but even acquaintanceless, if I had been brought up in a convent."

"I mean that you shall know them, then," said May, with decision. "You'd like them; they live in the next block to us, in a 'flat'—two sisters and a younger brother, and a delightful old aunt. Her name isn't Raymond—it's Miss Sarah Bowne, though every body who knows her calls her Aunt Sally. There is an older sister, a lovely soul, married to that young Mr. Osborne who is considered such a promising artist, and living in a suit of rooms in the building where he has his studio. You must know them, too—but that isn't the point. If you could capture Aunt Sally, your fortune would be made, but I don't know whether Alice and Marion and Dick Raymond would have you arrested or boycotted, if you were to attempt it!"

"Then I'd better not!" and May noted, with keen pleasure, the smile which accompanied Muriel's reply.

"I'm not so sure of that. They don't really need her

now, as they did a few years ago, when they first came to Boston, and I can't think of any body who would be such a clear comfort to you, and such a magnificent prime minister, so to speak, as Aunt Sally would be ! But come, I am going to make you go to bed, because I must, and we can finish our talk to-morrow evening. I can be here earlier than I was this evening, I hope."

" You're sure your aunt can spare you for a few nights more, dear ? "

" Very sure ! I am always quite comfortable about her, when Miss Post is there. And you don't know how it pleases me to have you want me. I like to be wanted ! "

" Most people do, I fancy," said Muriel, rather sadly, " but some of us are more *wantable* than others."

Muriel felt a pang of self-reproach as she realized how pleasant the evening had been, and what a sense of freedom was already stealing over her. It seemed to her that she must be utterly heartless, and that it was treason to take possession of all the good things left her by her grandfather, when she was unable to grieve for his death. Something of this she expressed to May, and was comforted by the latter's quiet, sensible view of the matter.

And another night of sound sleep went far toward destroying morbid thoughts and fancies. Her strong young frame was quickly re-acting from the strain which had been put upon it, and Margery's heart rejoiced as she saw the color returning to the cheek and the light to the eye of her " bairn."

CHAPTER III.

FINDING.

"But time has taught me this—if hope's a cloud,
Changing its color till it melt away,
Fear is as fanciful. Our hearts are cowed
By their own conjuring. The riper day
Finds hopes and fears but battlements of snow,
Wind-built, sun-gilt, which one night's rain lays low"

—T. W. PARSONS.

MURIEL soon saw, or fancied she saw, that May was over-fatiguing herself in her effort to be in two places, if not exactly at once, yet too nearly so for her own comfort and convenience. She would not discuss the matter with May, but when, at the end of three or four days, she found that Miss Post was ready to begin sewing for her, she proceeded promptly to carry out a plan which she had been revolving in her mind ever since May's first talk about the seamstress, and which seemed to her to be her first "opportunity." She ascertained that Miss Post spent her mornings in her own home, and of this May had given her the address, not suspecting that she meant to do more than engage the seamstress for some temporary work. But Muriel had a larger design than this, and although it presented difficulties, she silenced them with the thought that in every plan and arrangement there is something to be "made straight," in order to its carrying out.

Muriel had gone through a sort of secondary "engage-

ment " with her great-aunt Matilda, concerning mourning. Mrs. Hardcastle's idea, freely imparted to her niece, was that, in view of " all she owed to her grandpapa," no black could be too " dead," no crape too costly, or profusely used, as a mark of gratitude and respect, if not of love.

" My dear child," she said, " you really *must* have a veil. I am surprised that you have the slightest doubt about it! The best English crape, of course, and reaching to the top of the lowest ruffle on your skirt. After the first Sunday or two, when you will wear it over your face, it can be draped back over your bonnet, and permanently fastened with jet pins—*dead* jet, mind ; not the kind that shines. And if I were you, I would have the basque and overskirt of your street-dress entirely covered with crape."

Muriel had waited patiently for the end of the sentence to come, and when at last it came, because Mrs. Hardcastle, being, in her own phrase, " a little stout," was obliged to pause for breath, Muriel said quietly, but with much decision :

" Aunt Matilda, grandpapa spoke to me one day, during his illness, about this very thing. He said he hoped nobody would ever wear what is called ' mourning ' for him ; that he saw no reason why people should not dress in quiet colors, or even in black, after a death in the family, if it made them any more comfortable to do so, but that he wished all the ' parade part of it,' as he called it, could be put a stop to forever. And you must see that I cannot bring myself to disregard one of his very last wishes. I could not, even if it were something very hard and distasteful to me, as I will not pretend this is, for I quite agree with him about it."

" But Muriel ! " said Mrs. Hardcastle, looking very much shocked, " just think what people will say ! You can't go about telling every one what you have just told me, and

they wouldn't understand it, if you were to. And, my dear, wherever your dear grandfather is, it is surely most unlikely that he will know any thing of what is going on here."

Muriel's eyes filled with tears. Her grandfather had never made it possible for her to love him, but it seemed to her that she came nearer doing so just now than she had ever done before; and she answered with a warmth and decision that silenced even Mrs. Hardcastle on that subject, and in Muriel's presence. At home, and in various other places, she did not feel called upon to be silent, and, told as she told it, the story really sounded quite well.

"My brother-in-law had a prejudice against mourning," Mrs. Hardcastle would say, feelingly, "and we must admit that it often *is* a sad travesty, and among the last utterances which Muriel of course holds most sacred, was a request that it should not be put on for him. He quite saw the suitableness of dressing in black after one has met with such a loss as Muriel has suffered, and this she will of course do, but I can not blame the dear child for adhering so rigidly to her grandfather's wishes, when she owes so much to him!"

So Muriel was left in peace upon this subject, and, gradually, upon many others. For it dawned upon Mrs. Hardcastle, after awhile, that, while Muriel listened politely to all she chose to say, it did not appear to have any effect upon her, beyond that of frequent annoyance.

Mr. Hardcastle had taken his turn at remonstrating and suggesting, and Muriel seeing the reasonableness of his wish that she should not undertake to live entirely alone, had assured him that she would provide herself with a companion as soon as she could find some one even moderately suitable. But when he suggested that she should advertise she begged to be excused, and he was too glad of

the concession just made, as he thought, to his wishes to push his attempt at influencing her too far.

Muriel left the house for the first time since the day of her grandfather's funeral, when, not quite a week afterward, she went to see Miss Post. Many misgivings had attended her concerning the step she was about to take, and she was very glad that she had taken no one into her confidence about it, and so was still free to change her mind should she wish to do so. But she did not wish to, after a few minutes' talk with Miss Post, for the old lady's gentle, deprecating manner and fragile appearance entirely won Muriel's heart, and her only difficulty now was a fear that she might state her proposal awkwardly, or in such a manner as to hurt Miss Post's feelings.

But there are a few people in the world who have the blessed gift of taking no offense where no offense is meant, and Miss Post was among the number. She listened with increasing surprise, as Muriel said :

"I wished to ask if you would be willing to give up your room, and come to stay permanently with me at four dollars a week. My house is very large, and I could give you a nice, sunny bedroom and a sitting-room, quite to yourself. Your meals would be sent up to the sitting-room so that whenever you wished to have a friend to dinner or tea, you would be free from interruption, and I have so much sewing to be done—for I do not like to sew at all, and never do it if I can help it—that you need not fear not having enough to do. There is a very good sewing machine, I believe, or you could sew by hand if you preferred it."

"But I do not think I should be worth that much!" replied Miss Post, after an astonished pause, "I am only paid a dollar a day for dressmaking, and I can very seldom get more than three days' work in one week, so you see that leaves me four days' board, and the rent of my room

to pay all the time. And then, sometimes, when my arm is very bad, I am obliged to stop working entirely for a day or two. I would like it very much—I would accept at once, if I thought it fair to you—but I do not."

The gentle, wistful expression of her face, as she spoke, went to Muriel's heart.

"Will you let me be the judge of what your services would be worth to me?" she asked gently, adding, as Miss Post remained silent:

"You have been very highly recommended to me, and what I chiefly want is some one in whom I can feel entire confidence."

"If you are sure," said Miss Post, flushing at Muriel's words, "I should like it very, very much. This is a cold room—you see it faces north; but I can not afford to pay any more rent than I am paying here, and I am not able to find a better room for that; indeed, few that I have looked at are so good. I think, if I were in a sunny room all the time, that I should be disabled much less often, perhaps not at all, after a while. How soon would you wish me to come?"

"To-morrow, or the next day, if you could be ready," answered Muriel, "and I should like to send some one to help you pack your things, and dispose of any you do not wish to keep. Perhaps you would like to bring some articles of furniture with you. If there is any thing you are fond of, and do not wish to sell, just tell me, and I will have space left for it in your rooms."

"You are very kind—you are more than kind," said Miss Post, gratefully, "and there are three or four things with which I should hate to part; that armchair, and the chest of drawers, and the little work-table, and the candlestand. They were my mother's. About the rest of the furniture I do not care at all, and I will just send it to be sold. You

see I have heard of you, too, and I do not feel afraid to 'burn my ships.'"

"You need not, I think," responded Muriel, greatly pleased by the old lady's confiding acceptance of the bargain, and, to tell the truth, with having so easily got over the part of the arrangement which she had dreaded, that about the private table.

She had thought the matter over very carefully, and had come to the conclusion that it would be better and more conducive to the comfort of both to settle it beforehand in this way, but she had been afraid that Miss Post would misunderstand her, and construe what she said into a slight. Just now, while she was quite alone, she would have preferred having almost any one at the table with her to the dreariness of solitude, but she foresaw that the time might come when even so gentle and unobtrusive a companion might be an embarrassment.

Fortunately for her project, Miss Post was not "thin-skinned;" indeed, she would have felt the constraint quite as much as Muriel would, for in most of the places where she worked her meals were sent to the sewing-room, and she had grown accustomed to eating alone, from this, and from the many days passed in the solitude of her room. So it was settled that, with Margery's help, she was to be ready the next day but one, and Muriel went home well satisfied with her day's work. She had made a beginning, and "it is the first step that costs."

She told May at dinner of what she had done, and was greatly cheered by her cousin's warm approval and hearty interest.

"You must take your release as soon as Miss Post is established here, dear May," said Muriel, "for I know how much your aunt must miss you, and I will not let you stay when there is no real necessity for it."

"If you steal my substitute, I suppose I must take you at your word," said May, smiling, "but I shall hate to leave you. I do *wish* I could catch Aunt Sally for you!"

"Tell me more about Aunt Sally, please," replied Muriel, in whom, each day, new interest, and even excitement in the life before her awakened more and more. "I have heard you mention her so often since we have been together, that I am growing quite curious concerning her, and even beginning to think seriously of trying to 'capture' her, as you suggest. Now, you are going to lie on the lounge—oh yes, you are! You may have 'all the pillys,' if you like, to bring your head up to the level of mine, and I will sit in this low chair, but you shall put your feet up, and take a thorough rest, or else I will not say another word to you, or let you say one to me! There—it quite rests me to look at you. Now you can tell me all about Aunt Sally, please."

May had laughingly yielded to Muriel's despotic arrangement of her, for she was indeed very tired, and, being herself the care-taker at home, care and comforting were doubly grateful to her.

"I hardly know where to begin," she said, "for Aunt Sally is one of my specialties, too, and I am afraid of boring you, if I once get fairly started with her for my text."

"'Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end,'" quoted Muriel, "there's a sound piece of advice fresh from Wonderland."

"Very well, then—on your own head be it, if you *are* bored! I suppose the beginning will be when I first saw her, although I did not know who she was then. I shall never forget the tableau—it was extremely '*vivant!*' I was walking along Commonwealth Avenue one bright afternoon, and the world and his wife were walking there, too, for it was one of the first bright days of spring. I met several people who were smiling in an amused sort of

"Aunt Sally was holding a big, clumsy boy of twelve or thirteen by the arm."

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way, and then I came upon the tableau. Aunt Sally was standing very erect, holding a big, clumsy boy of twelve or thirteen by the arm, and in front of them was a little fellow about half the size of the other, rubbing his knuckles into his eyes and sobbing. I couldn't help stopping to look and listen, and Aunt Sally was just saying :

"'— if you'd take a boy of your size, but to pretend to be fighting with a little mite like that, when in reality you were only thrashing him, proves you a liar as well as a coward !'

"'He sassed me !' said the big boy, sullenly.

"'And suppose he did ?' answered Aunt Sally, severely. "'If his *sass* was true you've no right to complain, and if it wasn't, you need not mind it.' Then, with a ludicrously sudden change of tone, she said, very kindly :

"'Now, my boy, you know that in this country every body has the chance of being president some day, and the very first step toward governing other people, or being thought worthy to do it, is to govern yourself. I often see you, and I often think what a good, big, strong body you've been given, and how much you ought to do in the world, but you'll not do one thing that's worth while until, with God's help, you take yourself in hand and do battle with your own badness. Will you try ?'

"I can't remember her exact words, but what she said was something like this, and I thought how she was wasting her ammunition ! But you ought to have seen that great, lumpish fellow straighten up, and lift his eyes to her face. It made me think of a light coming into a dark room.

"'Nobody never talked to me like that before,' he said, 'and I don't know as I could do it, but if you'd let me bring you a paper sometimes—not to pay for it, I don't mean, but if I've one left over—and you'd sort of go over it again to me, may be I could try. And I'm sorry I

whopped *him ;* it wasn't no lie, what he said. Shake hands, will you, Billy ? '

" I began to feel like an eavesdropper, and so, to use an expressive piece of slang, 'I came away then,' but I thought how I should like to know that old lady ! She was rather tall, and very straight-backed, with piercing dark-gray eyes, as I found afterward—I thought they were black, while she was talking to the boy—and nearly white hair, arranged in a round curl on each side of her face. She had taken a step or two forward in her eagerness, and I saw that she was quite lame, but I never saw any one who so impressed me with a sense of her energy ; there was a sort of abounding life in every motion she made. So you may think how delighted I was when I met her, not two weeks after witnessing her engagement with the newsboy. One of my friends asked me to go with her to call on the Raymonds, who had just come to Boston, she said, from a delightful old home in the country, and had gone to housekeeping in a very nice flat in a private house, with a very entertaining old 'cousin, or aunt, or something' to matronize them, and this ambiguous person proved, of course, to be Aunt Sally. I have liked her more and more, every day that I have known her since then, and I flatter myself that she likes me a little, for she is the soul of sincerity, and I know she would not pretend to if she didn't. It seems that these Raymonds were left, after their father's and mother's death, without enough money to carry on the place, and yet they did not wish to sell it, for the boy was only waiting till he should be old enough to take charge of the farm ; but in the meantime, it was necessary for the older girls to do something, and for the younger girl and the boy to finish their education. So they hit upon this plan of keeping house in a few rooms, as being cheaper than boarding, and persuaded Aunt Sally to take the helm. Alice, the oldest

girl, spent the first winter with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton—she was not in very good health, I believe, but I've always had a little uncharitable corner in my heart about it—and Rose found a very good situation in a private school, and Marion was taken there as a pupil, with an arrangement that she should teach afterward, and she's doing it now. It was—and is—the most charming place to visit. I always go there if I feel low in my mind, or anything is worrying me, and somehow it doesn't seem worth worrying over, when I've been there a little while. The three sisters are very unlike. Rose, who is married, you know, to that nice, clever Mr. Osborne, the artist, is a sweet, gentle, spirited creature, with a great deal of sympathy for every body, and Alice is gentle, too, and perhaps more intellectual than Rose, but she always looks to me as if she were inclined to fret over trifles, and dislike to be disturbed in any way. Marion is best described by the word square—not that she's square-looking, for she isn't ; she's by far the prettiest of the three, now, but she's so incorruptibly honest ! I don't think I ever knew any one so sensitive about truth. And yet she is not given to judging other people—she is rather inclined to the mistake of imagining that every one comes up to her own standard. She's the most guileless creature ! The boy is something like her ; he's a nice fellow, and seems to be managing to grow up without inflicting the proverbial 'awkward age' on every body connected with him. Indeed, I often wish that some of the grown-ups I could mention were half so chivalrous as he is. He's about fifteen, I think, but very tall and strong for his age, and he hates city life cordially. It shows how strong his sisters' influence over him is, that he has promised to go to school until he is at least eighteen, before he takes entire charge of the farm, but he spends all his vacations there now, and he and Marion have a great deal

of talk about what they will do when he is eighteen, and settles there permanently. They always spend their summers there, and Mr. and Mrs. Osborne go with them, and Mr. and Mrs. Craig, too, for part of the summer. Mrs. Craig is their first cousin; she was Fanny Hamilton. And while they are there, Aunt Sally and Marion and Rose 'put up' incredible quantities of every thing, and manage so beautifully that they really have only to buy their meat and groceries in the winter, and yet they keep the nicest table. I said that Aunt Sally was so lame, the first time I saw her, but she's much better now. Dr. Osborne, the girls' uncle, who lives not far from Dovedale—that's the name of their country-place—took her in hand the first summer they had her there, and nearly cured her. He says he could quite cure her if she had only one lazy bone in her body! But I am not going to wear you out talking about her any more—she's my eighth wonder of the world, aunty says, and an inexhaustible subject."

"You're not wearing me out yet," replied Muriel, as May paused. "I'm deeply interested in all you've said, and my mind has only wandered to the extent of wondering whether these charming people would be willing to come and see me and be my friends. Do you think they would, if you were to tell them how much I want them to?"

"I know they would," answered May, confidently, "though I will confess," she added, laughing a little, "that they would take more immediate pleasure in doing so, if you were a destitute stranger, without any friends or relatives in Boston, and they thought they could put you in the way of finding congenial employment!"

A shadow swept over Muriel's face.

"If they only knew—" she said, and made a pause of which May hastened to take advantage by saying brightly:

"I think, if you will let me, I will bring Aunt Sally by

herself, first of all, for if she should strike you as she struck me, and you should really wish to have her come and live with you, it would be easier for you to make friends with her, and enlist her sympathy, if you had her all to yourself."

"I don't believe she'd be willing to leave her nieces and nephew, and the home she's so fond of, to come to a perfect stranger," said Muriel, doubtfully, "and to tell the truth, I should hardly have the face to ask her!"

"Of course, you would not ask her at the very first interview, dear, but if you knew her as well as I think I do, you would also know that, were she once to believe it her duty to come and live with you, the fact of having to give up her pleasure to do it would not have a feather's weight against you, but would, on the other hand, be a strong factor in your favor! I sometimes think that if Aunt Sally had been a man, she would have been a sort of pioneer missionary. She'd have gone to the extreme west, most probably, and taken up land, and planted a school-house, and a church, and a sewing-society, and then, when every thing was fairly going, and likely to prosper, she'd have 'moved on' to fresh fields and pastures new. I can fancy her civilizing and enlightening a whole territory, advancing serenely through a howling wilderness, and conquering all before her. And her very first secular instruction would always be in the art and mystery of making home-made yeast. I do believe she thinks that good bread is only second to good morals and manners. Her motto ought to be: 'Let me make the bread of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws!'"

"Now, May, don't set me to work at that vexed question again, for pity's sake! It has tormented me quite enough, for it will not stay settled! I thought, after our talk about

it the other evening, that it would never worry me again, but it's a perfect jack-in-the-box ! "

" Then shut the lid, and fasten it down, my dear, and you are at least safe for the present."

" But isn't that cowardly ? "

" That depends. Courage sometimes consists, I think, in acknowledging oneself a coward, and taking precautions accordingly. You know the suggestion that, instead of stopping to battle with a specific temptation, we should just try to rise to a higher level, where the temptation has no place ! So we will not attack your vexed question all over again just now, if you please ; I must confess to being sleepy, humiliating as the confession is, and though I somehow feel as if we were each to start on a long journey day after to-morrow morning, in opposite directions, and so ought to say a great deal more to each other to-night."

" Oh, please don't say that," exclaimed Muriel, with a sort of terror, " it's hard enough to give you up, without any such horrid suggestion as that—and we will see each other very often, will we not ? "

" Indeed, we will! " replied May, cordially, " I mean to come and dine and sleep with you at least once a week, ' until further notice,' if you will lend Miss Post to aunty, for those evenings."

" I'll try to spare her ! And I'm glad you said that ; it reminds me of something I wished to ask you. You know Miss Post is to be installed day after to-morrow evening, and I mean to ask her to take dinner with me the first night—it will make her feel more at home, I think, and I want you and Miss Forsythe to come too. Will you ? And do you think she will ? "

" I will, with much pleasure, and I have no hesitation in promising for her ; we're sufficiently intimate for me to take that liberty. And you were going to show me Miss

Post's rooms, and we've talked the whole evening away, and I hear Margery coughing about the hall, with an admonition in every cough ! Well, I can see the rooms day after to-morrow evening, and see Miss Post's delight and surprise, too. She will be lost in wonder over every single arrangement you have made for her comfort, dear soul ! She's a case in point, Muriel—just look at all she hasn't, and—but I will not raise the lid again ! Come." And May marched her cousin off to bed with a great show of authority.

They quite agreed that it was "absurd" to talk about parting the next morning but one, yet May felt very regretful, and Muriel very desolate when the good-byes had been said. For the frequent meetings which they promised themselves would not be quite the same as these few days of close companionship had been, and they both knew it."

Muriel pleased herself, for awhile, with arranging in her mind what she would send May, very soon—certain books and music of which they had spoken ; a chair like the one which stood in front of the library hearth ; flowers every two or three days ; and then came sorrowfully the irresistible conclusion that, at least, for the present, she must deny herself this gratification. Their intimacy had sprung up so suddenly, that a little going back would be necessary, before all was made even. May might take the alarm, if Muriel should be incautiously generous, and draw back, even now, after coming so near ; for, sturdy and healthy as her common-sense evidently was, it might not be proof against the imputation of interested motives in "cultivating" Muriel's acquaintance and friendship. And she would, Muriel knew, appreciate the abstinence from any thing that would place her in an embarrassing position, and not ascribe it to any mean or sordid motive, and this was a great comfort. So she turned from her vain imaginings to

the practical pleasure of overseeing the arrangement of Miss Post's rooms. Margery had put them in spotless order, and it only remained to have removed the articles of furniture which would be in the way when the few treasures possessed by the new resident should arrive, and to fill one of the windows with flowers from a neighboring florist's. The order for these Margery was to leave on her way to help the dressmaker with her final preparations.

They came promptly, and it was while she was arranging them, with keen pleasure, in the deep window-seat of the sunniest window, that Muriel suddenly realized that the conservatory, for which she had timidly and vainly petitioned a year ago, was now within her power, and as soon as she was satisfied that the rooms were as attractive as they could, at such short notice, be made, she went back to the library and beguiled the rest of the day in drawing plans and making estimates, and was agreeably surprised by the flight of time, when Margery came to tell her that Miss Post had arrived, and was crying!

In great consternation Muriel flew to the rescue, but she was quickly reassured as to the state of Miss Post's feelings.

The contrast between the barren poverty of the room she had left, and the prettiness and cheerfulness of her new abode had overcome her, but only for a moment, and by the time Muriel had knocked and been admitted, the tears had been resolutely banished, and May's prophecy was quickly fulfilled—not a detail of the arrangement of the two rooms escaped recognition and heartfelt gratitude.

Muriel often thought, in after days and years, of the lasting effect which this reception of her first independent effort to give pleasure had. It saved her from discouragement many a time, when she seemed to have failed, or when a rude rebuff took the place of gratitude, and made

her realize, as she came to know more of the world in which she lived, how the "rough places" had been "made plain" for her untried feet.

Margery was beaming with delight at the awakening of interest and pleasure in her "bairn's" heart, and made the ample excuse of a cup of tea for Miss Post, to get the benefit of the happy change.

"I'm so glad you thought of that, Margery," said Muriel, gratefully. "I was just going to ask you," she added, turning to Miss Post, "to dine with me in the library this evening, for Miss Forsythe and May are coming, and I don't belive you stopped to eat your dinner to-day, you must have been so busy."

"I had a substantial lunch," said Miss Post, apologetically, "but it will be none the less pleasant to dine with you and my dear friends this first evening. And I will not try to tell you how happy you have made me, Miss Douglas—happier than I ever hoped to be in this world. I never dreamed of having such a home as this."

"I am very glad you are pleased," said Muriel, simply. "We tried to make it pleasant for you, Margery and I. But now I am going to leave you, for when you have had your tea you must lie down and rest until dinner time. We shall not dine until seven, because Miss Forsythe could not come any earlier, May said. So good-by for the present."

Muriel long remembered the evening which followed, as one does remember the bright places in life, sometimes using them to illuminate the dark ones. It was the first lifting of the heavy strain which had been imposed upon her, not only during her grandfather's illness, and since his death, but for months and years before, when, unconsciously to herself, her mind and character had been warped by the unnatural life of her home. She found herself talking freely to Miss Forsythe of her vague plans and ideas, and

the difficulties which seemed to spring up, like ill weeds, about every project, until she was almost afraid to venture upon any thing, for fear of doing more harm than good.

"I would not encourage that spirit, my dear, whatever you do," said Miss Forsythe. "It would be better for you to make all sorts of blunders at first than to sink into the would-be-irresponsible state of so many rich people. We are all inclined to fly to extremes, because they seem the shortest way out of our difficulties, but they are not, really. And the trouble with all anxious people, or so it seems to me, is perfectly useless anticipation. We are seldom, if ever, at a loss to know what we should do to-day, but we fret because we foresee trouble for to-morrow, or the next day. For you, just now, a little waiting and finding out seems the best thing. I am far from wishing to meddle—"

"Oh, please don't even suggest that you could!" interrupted Muriel, eagerly.

"I will not, then. But I was about to suggest that you should begin by having a good talk with your lawyer, and gaining a thorough, practical knowledge of all your affairs. Then you will know just where you stand, and how far out you may venture."

"I don't know the first *thing* about business!" exclaimed Muriel, in dismay.

"All the more reason for proceeding to know without further loss of time!" replied Miss Forsythe, inexorably, but with a very kindly smile. "It will save you a vast amount of future time and trouble to do this, and be good for you, besides. I think May told me that old Mr. Keith had taken charge of all your grandfather's business, and still had charge of yours? His firm is noted for honesty and fair dealing, and you would run no danger, so far as any one can see, of getting into trouble, should you leave every thing to them, and just ask for your money as you want it;

but do you not think, yourself, that it would be much more satisfactory, both to them and to you, to begin with a clear knowledge of your affairs? For one thing, if there is any real estate, you should know all about that—whether there are houses on it, and what sort of tenants you have, if there are. That, it seems to me, is of the first importance."

"I never thought of that," said Muriel, brightening as she spoke; "that would really be interesting, and would make up, perhaps, for having to listen to so much that would seem stupid. Thank you, dear Miss Forsythe, for all you have said. May told me you could help me. I suppose the first thing will be to write a note to Mr. Keith, and ask him to come and have a talk with me. I will do that to-morrow. I had been thinking a little of trying to find some nice, bright woman, with an arithmetical head, for a sort of clerk, but I am afraid you think that I might be my own clerk. Do you?"

"For the present I do," replied Miss Forsythe, with that unhesitating decision which was so comfortable to Muriel, so surprising, and at times almost disconcerting, to gentle little Miss Post. "After awhile," she added, "when you are thoroughly conversant with your own affairs, and have work in hand of more value and importance, you may find some such person a necessity, but that has nothing to do with to-day."

"I wish," said Muriel, wistfully, "that I could my keep head as clear as you keep yours! It must make every thing go so much more easily. Did you always do it, or did you have to learn how?"

"I had to learn how, very decidedly," said Miss Forsythe, "and I do not by any means keep it as clear yet as I would like to. But I have learned, I hope, the uselessness of forecasting. I don't mean that one should be heedless

and careless about the future—far from that ; but merely that, having done whatever seems for the best to-day, we should simply and reverently leave the result in God's hands. I often long to give a very simple recipe to anxious people—let them write out, over night, what they expect to have happen to them the next day, going as much into detail as they can ; and then, the next evening let them write what really did happen. I do not mean that it will, necessarily, be either better or worse than their anticipations, but only that it will be so utterly different nine times out of ten, as to prove the futility of forecasting."

Muriel did not reply, because she felt incredulous, but she made up her mind to try the "recipe" at once, and that night after her guests had left her, and Miss Post had said good-night, and several other things, she sat down at the writing-table, found a piece of blank paper, and then, smiling a little at the suggestion her hunt for it had given, she wrote :

"I expect to breakfast at eight o'clock to-morrow morning ; to go into town about nine, and do some shopping ; to be back, certainly, in time for a one o'clock lunch ; to write a note to Mr. Keith, asking him to come as soon as he can and let me have a talk with him ; to dine alone at six o'clock ; to spend the evening writing letters and reading."

Muriel read this over, and then smiled again, as she thought of merely affixing "Fulfilled" to it the next evening, and handing it to Miss Forsythe at the first opportunity. She did not at all intend to give way to vain forebodings, but she thought Miss Forsythe's zeal had carried her a little too far. Margery knocked and entered softly while she was still pondering over the programme, but her gentle : "Are you not coming away to bed, Miss

Muriel? It's long past ten," somehow annoyed Muriel a little. Was she never to be free, in small matters, to follow out her own inclinations? So she answered kindly, but perhaps rather more decidedly than was necessary :

" Not yet, Margery. I had a nap this afternoon, you know, and I'm not at all sleepy. Don't wait for me, please. You can shut the door between the rooms, and I will open it softly when I am ready for bed."

Margery lingered a moment as if about to speak again, but seemed to change her mind.

" Good night then, my deary," she said, and closed the door upon herself as softly as she had opened it.

The fire was still bright upon the hearth, and the reading-lamp, scrupulously cared for by Margery, who would trust it to no one else, threw a circle of mellow light around it. For the first time since her grandfather's death Muriel felt like reading, and took from the low revolving bookcase, which stood near her chair, a book which she had begun some weeks before, and never finished.

It was one of the modern controversial books, of the making of which the wise King might have prophesied, when he said there was " no end," but it was cleverly written, and aroused Muriel's thinking powers in a way which she found very pleasant ; so she read on, quite unconscious of the passage of time, until she had finished the last page, and then, glancing up at the noiseless mantle-clock—for her grandfather never would have a striking clock in any of the rooms he occupied—she was startled to find that it was nearly one. The gas was always left burning, slightly turned down, in both the upper and lower halls at night, so she had only to put out her reading-lamp and hasten upstairs, trying to shake off the feeling that this unwonted liberty-taking with time would bring a reprimand upon

her in the morning. The door between her room and Margery's was shut, according to her order, and she opened it with burglar-like caution, when she was ready for bed, listened a moment, and then, assured by the darkness and silence that she had not disturbed her faithful attendant, was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

She had given no orders about being called in the morning, for she had of late been waking unnecessarily and annoyingly early, so that it was only when she was nearly dressed, the next morning, that she chanced to look at her watch, and discovered that it was half-past nine o'clock! She had already made the discovery that it was a rainy day, and now she made a third—that her shopping expedition could very well wait for pleasanter weather. She remembered that there was a small stock of paper and envelopes in the little old writing-desk which stood on a table in her room, and for the different materials which were to provide Miss Post with sewing, she could also afford to wait.

She mildly reproached Margery for not having called her—to be not quite so mildly reproached, in turn, for having sat up half the night!

"Now Margery!" she answered, laughing a little, "you don't know how long I sat up, for you were sound asleep when I came to bed—I know you were."

"That may very well be," admitted Margery, gravely, "it was high time for folk to be asleep, but when I went to fill the lamp this morning, it was near empty!"

Muriel halted a moment between amusement and vexation, but fortunately the former conquered. After all, she thought, it would be rather forlorn to be absolutely free—to have nobody care for one's concerns but just oneself. And certainly, Margery had not allowed her displeasure to affect her darling's comfort so far as breakfast was con-

cerned. Muriel dawdled so long over the tempting little meal, that the bell rang not more than five minutes after she had finished, and the tray had been carried from the library and Margery came to say that "Miss Hardcastle was in the parlor."

Muriel hesitated; she had arranged in her own mind that she would see only her intimates—present and prospective—in the library, but the parlor had always seemed a dreary room to her; it was heated solely by the furnace, the windows were hung with heavy, light-excluding draperies, and to-day, with pouring rain and leaden clouds outside, it would be intolerable. And she liked Julia Hardcastle, so—

"Show her in here, please, Margery," she said, and in a moment Julia's bright, agreeable face made Muriel glad of her decision.

"My family voted me crazy, without a single dissenting voice, for coming out in such weather, even to see you," said Julia, as she shook Muriel's proffered hand with a hearty friendliness, which Muriel found very pleasant. "But I am always seized with a spirit of restlessness on stormy days, and find that there is some imperative reason for going out, so this morning I said I knew no one else would be rash enough to brave the pelting of the pitiless for your sake, and that I knew you would mope yourself to death, and felt that it was my mission to keep you from doing it, so here I am! Are you glad to see me, or were you counting on a nice quiet day all to yourself?"

"Indeed, I am very glad," said Muriel warmly, "and now you are just going to take off your hat and that wet cloak, and stay to lunch with me. Please don't say you can not!"

"I had no idea of saying it! This room is much more cheerful than the sewing-room at home from which I fled—we are having a dressmaker in the house, for our sins—and

I will confess that I told mamma not to be uneasy if I did not appear until somewhere near dinner time. Oh, thank you, Margery—it is not so very wet, after all, you see, Muriel."

She handed her cloak and hat to Margery, who had appeared in answer to Muriel's ring, and stood waiting orders, and well pleased that her "bairn" was not to be left alone this dismal day.

"Miss Hardcastle will stay to lunch with me, Margery," said Muriel, in a voice so much more cheerful than it had been an hour ago that Margery at once resolved to reward Miss Hardcastle with a very good lunch indeed!

"Oh, do you have it in here? How charming!" said Julia, as Rogers went about his duty of laying the little table in his usual silent and deft manner.

"Yes," replied Muriel. "The dining-room seemed so dreadfully large, just at first, and now I have grown used to eating here, and I like it so much better that I shall not make any change for the present. I always did like this room better than any other in the house; I think, partly, because it was here that grandpapa first noticed me and made friends with me."

And she told Julia the story of her introduction to the room.

Julia laughed heartily.

"What a little limb you must have been!" she said, "I wish you had not been obliged to sober down so completely afterward. But I sincerely hope that the quality, whatever it was, that sent you sliding down the balusters that day, has only been scotched, not killed, and that I shall see manifestations of it before long!"

"I don't know," said Muriel, meditatively. "Sometimes I think one way, and sometimes the other. And I do believe that if I had had a chance, I should have been a

very bad little girl ; so perhaps it was all for the best, as the old lady in the tract said about every thing. Come, lunch is ready—but I think a cup of coffee would be nice, don't you ? "

" Yes, I think so ; but, my dear Muriel, you know it's Lent, and I am pledged against tea and coffee until Easter morning ; but don't, if you please, let that hinder you from having it ; I can enjoy the smell, which is often really better than the taste."

" Oh, no, I don't care about it at all. I thought I remembered that you liked it. It is very good of you to give it up, I think. Do you always give up something ? "

" I have, for the past few years—since I have been confirmed. But I am not at all clear about the goodness. Mr. Percival—our minister, you know—asks us all to give up something during Lent, and I chose tea and coffee for two reasons : I like them better than I like any thing to eat, and the giving them up, even for not quite six weeks, has such a charming effect upon my complexion that I only wish I had sufficient strength of mind to do it altogether ! "

Muriel was silent. She could not think of any adequate answer to this exceedingly frank declaration, that would not, under the circumstances, be impolite ; and Julia, fortunately, did not appear to notice the silence, but chatted on, most amusingly, glancing from one subject to another with a rapidity and versatility which seemed astonishing to her quieter cousin. Lunch was finished, the table removed, and still Julia stayed on, honestly enjoying herself, for Muriel, under the unwonted influence, had brightened very much, and, if not taking a fair share in the lively talk, was at least a very evidently appreciative listener. The gathering dusk at length seemed to suggest to Julia that dinner time must be approaching, and she rose to go. Muriel felt a sudden shrinking from the loneliness and silence of a

solitary evening in the library, which, by contrast with the cheerful afternoon, seemed unendurable, and she laid a detaining hand on Julia's arm as she said:

"Oh, why must you go? Why can't you just stay all night with me?"

The sincerity of the invitation was so evident that Julia looked genuinely pleased.

"Why, I haven't my tooth-brush, my dear," she answered, laughing, "and besides, although my family, I am thankful to say, is not unduly solicitous, it might consider itself called upon to be alarmed, should I not appear by bedtime."

"But if you will write aunt Matilda a note, and ask for what you wish for the night, including your tooth-brush, Rogers shall take it as soon as he has brought in dinner. Margery can wait on us."

"I have no answer to that argument, because I really would like to stay," said Julia, "if I wouldn't, I could invent an unanswerable answer! Do you know, Muriel, I think you are *very* much to be envied? Fancy being monarch of all you survey, in a great castle like this, with nothing to do but order your servants about, like that man in the Bible! What good times you ought to have, after a little while, when you begin to go into society again!"

"If you knew how lonely—," began Muriel; then she stopped herself. Where was the use? So she added, more lightly:

"There is no 'again' about it, for you know I never have been into 'society' at all. And, from what little I have seen of the outside of it, I am not sure that I shall consider the game worth the candle. It somehow strikes me as being a good deal more candle than game."

"That depends," replied Julia, "and Muriel, you mustn't, whatever you do or don't do, give yourself the name of being odd or eccentric. The eyes of Boston are upon you,

or will be, as soon as you emerge, and even if you don't exactly pine for it, you must act as if you did, to a certain extent."

A lively argument followed, which lasted through dinner, and well into the evening; it was perfectly good-humored on both sides, and left each of them more firmly convinced of the justice of her cause than it had found her. Julia herself proposed going to bed soon after ten. She was not minded to lose any of the benefits of her observance of Lent, and she intended, beside, to go to an early service next morning, but for this she begged Muriel not to disturb herself; their own breakfast hour was from eight to nine, and she could easily, she said, reach home in time for breakfast. Muriel had the good sense to accede to this arrangement, thereby raising herself still more in Julia's estimation, and the cousins parted with exceedingly friendly good-nights at the door of one of the stately "spare rooms." It had not occurred to either of them, as Muriel remembered afterward, with a smile, that they might sleep together. And it was only when Muriel was alone in her own room that she remembered her "programme," and read it with some amusement, but not very thorough conviction. "One swallow does not make a summer," and she thought that to-day had been merely an exception. It was only after repeated trials that she allowed herself to be convinced, and this very fact made her all the more thoroughly a convert to Miss Forsythe's view of the matter, when she did yield. The difference was not always so striking, but in one way or another, it was always there.

The note to Mr. Keith was written and posted early the next morning, asking him to come that afternoon, should he find it convenient to do so. She felt very much as if she were making an appointment with the dentist, and that the sooner she could get it over the better. Still, she sternly determined that she would not allow this

feeling to influence her judgment or conduct. She had seen, more and more, the sensibleness of Miss Forsythe's advice, and fully meant to carry it out. But how fervently she wished that the gay, handsome face which smiled at her from her treasured miniature of her father were beside her now in life and reality, so that she might, with a clear conscience, feel rid of of all responsibility.

CHAPTER IV.

A MORAL.

"I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know;
I would be dealt with as a child,
And guided where to go."

MURIEL had, in her note, requested Mr. Keith to send her word should it not suit him to see her that afternoon, and she received her letters at lunch-time, with a cowardly hope that a postponement of the interview might be among them, but it was not. There was an affectionate letter from the schoolfellow with whom she had been most intimate, Lina Fairfax, a note from Julia containing a promised address, and a few words of cordial pleasure concerning her impromptu visit, with a hope that it would soon be returned, and another from May Douglas, to say that, should Muriel have no engagement for that evening, she, May, would like to bring "Aunt Sally" to call.

"I will not tell you to try to make a very good impression in furtherance of our dark design," added May, "for I know what a dreadfully 'contrariwise' effect such counsels usually have, and I have an idea, moreover, that you and Aunt Sally are a pair of long-sundered kindred spirits, and that it will be a sort of 'Where-hast-thou-stayed-so-long' meeting, when you do meet. She is deeply interested in

you and your opportunities, already ; more, I am afraid I must confess, in the latter than the former, but we will soon change all that."

"So I am to have two ordeals in one day!" said Muriel to herself, as she finished reading May's note, "I almost wish—but no, I am not going to make an ordeal of that nice Miss Bowne's visit ; I shall try to fancy that it is just as May says, and that we shall feel well acquainted without any preliminary stiffness. Even if she should not care to come to live with me—and I am sure I don't see why she should!—she would be a great help just to have for a friend, and to go to whenever I am puzzled and in doubt. But that, I am afraid, will be more than half my time. I do wish one might make a sort of chess-board arrangement of one's life, the lines perfectly clear, and the divisions definite and unmistakable. It would be rather stupid, perhaps, but so much safer and easier than it is now."

Muriel buried herself in the big chair, and pursued this train of thought, until the subdued voice of Rogers, as he called her attention to the fact that he was, in the most correct manner, presenting her with a card upon a salver, interrupted her meditation. The card was inscribed : "Mr. Douglas Keith," and she laid it down with a passing thought of the coincidence of names, and a confused idea that old Mr. Keith's first name had always, heretofore, been Angus. Her bewilderment increased, when, as she entered the long parlor, or drawing-room, as her aunt invariably called it, a man who was, certainly, not more than thirty-five years old, rose from the easiest of the rather uneasy chairs, and came forward to meet her. She fancied she saw the glimmer of a smile, gone almost before it came, on the very good-looking face to which she raised her puzzled eyes, and this at once restored her to self-possession, and, in some mysterious way, to the recollection, as well,

that Mr. Keith had recently taken his two sons into partnership with himself—this, no doubt, was one of them, and a little feeling of displeasure at the substitution crossed her mind, and, quite possibly, her candid face, for Mr. Keith, after a courtly bow, opened the proceedings with :

" Miss Douglas, I believe ? Permit me to apologize for having come in my father's place. He is deeply engaged to-day, and will be for some days to come, upon a very important case, and as I was thoroughly conversant with the business connected with Mr. Hardcastle's estate, and as he thought you might have something of importance to communicate, I ventured, at his request, to substitute him—but only to assure you, Miss Douglas, should you prefer to wait until early next week, that he will be quite at your service then. He regrets very much that he should be obliged to disregard your first summons."

The ease and fluency with which this somewhat long sentence was delivered, seemed to deprive it of half its length, and Muriel,felt a little amused wonder as to whether it were " extrumpery, like most triles of patience," or the result of careful and successful composition and study.

She hesitated a moment before replying—a hesitation which called forth again that ghost of a smile—for it surely was no more. Here was her reprieve, should she choose to take it, but, if what this serious-looking member of the firm said were true, and it could scarcely be less, why should she ? Four days more of uncertainty did not look attractive.

" Thank you," she said, far more gravely than she had intended to speak, " you are very kind, but, if you are at leisure, and quite conversant, as you say, with my grandfather's affairs, there is no reason why I should trouble your father. What I wished was, to be told every thing that, were I a man, it would be thought needful for me to know

about the fortune which I have inherited. I understand that there is some real estate, and I think, from one or two things which my grandfather said during his last illness, that he had contemplated buying more, and had even begun the arrangement when he became too ill to attend further to it. I will try not to give you unnecessary trouble, but I feel that I must have a clear understanding of my affairs before I can act, or even plan, intelligently."

Accepting the theory that "man is like an onion," encompassed with many concentric layers, but with a savage for the core, it may be stated here that Mr. Douglas Keith whistled. But his firm-set lips remained closed, and the whistle was entirely inaudible. He bowed gravely, as he replied :

"I shall be happy to furnish you with the fullest information. But will you allow me to suggest that a memorandum-book might prove of assistance? You will scarcely find it possible, I am afraid, to remember all the details with which I shall be obliged to burden you, without some such help, for I will confess that, thoroughly as I have posted myself upon the main facts, I must ask your indulgence, concerning some minor details, until I can return to the office, and look over the papers once more. Your grandfather was strongly impressed with the wisdom of not investing a large sum in any one place, and this will add somewhat, I am afraid, to the trial of your patience, for which I must apologize beforehand."

"It is I who should apologize," said Muriel, with a bright little smile, "for giving you what may appear to you to be very needless trouble "—he bowed a courteous disclaimer— "but I think, I hope that this will, in the long run, be the easiest way both for you and myself. Surely it must be— to know exactly where one stands, and take no step in the dark, instead of going blindly on until one strikes a wall!

Perhaps we had better come to the library, for I shall take your advice, of course, about making memoranda."

She rose as she spoke, with the "springy motion" which should be so natural to all young things, but which struck Mr. Keith as a decided novelty, and led the way to the library. The writing table had been cleared of the piles of paper and memorandum-books with which Mr. Hardcastle had never permitted any interference, and Muriel, arming herself with a very new and long lead pencil, and the small blank-book in which she had already begun to record her household expenses, sat gravely down at one side of the table, while Mr. Keith, with equal gravity, drew a chair to the other.

He began his statement and explanations at once, without preface or preamble, and made every thing so clear, that Muriel had no difficulty whatever, as a general thing, in following him. Where she did not at first understand, she questioned until she did, and he could hot help seeing that the notes were many, but very short. Her questions were especially minute about the real estate, which, she found, consisted chiefly of a block of small shops on a small street. About half these were newly built; the rest had been built some ten or twelve years, and were beginning to call rather too frequently, Mr. Keith said, for repairs. The purchase which Mr. Hardcastle had been about to make, was of another block in the heart of the city, almost valueless, so far as the houses upon it were concerned, but in a business neighborhood, where property showed signs of rising. Mr. Hardcastle had intended, Mr. Keith thought, to destroy the unsightly houses which now occupied the block, and build a row of shops or warehouses for renting. His father, he said, had instructed him to say that, should Miss Douglas so desire, they would carry out this design at once, as the investment promised well, and the price of the block would probably rise before long.

Muriel knew that her grandfather had regarded the elder Mr. Keith as a man of strict integrity and unusually sound judgment, and she felt no hesitation about leaving the decision, in such matters as this, entirely in his hands. His son was evidently much pleased with her few words to this effect, and the interview ended with a very friendly feeling on both sides. Muriel had asked no foolish questions ; she had listened with unwavering attention, and, as her remarks proved, with perfect intelligence, while Mr. Keith, inspired, perhaps, by the quality of his auditor, had acquitted himself well. Muriel held out her hand with a cordial good-will, when the session was over, and spoke a few words of very sincere gratitude for her instructor's patience and lucidity, and he, instead of replying, as she was half afraid he would, with a fulsome compliment to the intellectual powers of his hearer, said simply that it gave him much pleasure to have satisfied her, and then, with the first hesitation he had shown, asked if he might be allowed to visit her.

"I know," he added, quickly, as if fearing that, should she reply immediately, it would be in the negative, "that you are, of course, neither visiting nor receiving general visitors, just now, but my father and your grandfather were very old friends, and I am presumptuous enough to hope that you will make an exception in my favor, and allow me to render you any and every service which a brother or cousin might be permitted to offer."

"You are very kind," said Muriel, simply and gratefully, "and it will give me pleasure to see you sometimes, but do not think me rude if I ask you to wait for a few weeks. It is all so new. I feel as if I had been suddenly thrust into a foreign country, and were learning the language."

She paused, at a loss for words which would rightly express her meaning, and his quiet, "I think I understand," pleased her more than any thing he could have said, so that

when he added, presently, "I will wait your permission to visit you, but if, in the meantime, you find that I can render you any service, I trust you will let me know," she answered, earnestly.

"I will—indeed I will!"

And Mr. Keith thereupon took his departure, and Muriel, standing where he had left her, in front of the fire, smiled to herself at the impression left by her first "ordeal."

"He seems so strong," she meditated, "and yet so very kind and gentle. And he did not say a single one of the foolish things which some people would have said. I think I should have liked a brother just like him; or no, not just like; that little smile, which he did not think I saw, was not at all becoming to him, and seemed somehow out of harmony. Now, I wonder if it was an indication of another side of his character, which he keeps, or thinks he keeps, quite out of sight?"

Muriel's speculation on this point was cut short by the announcement of dinner, before she had arrived at any definite conclusion, and as she sat down to her solitary meal, she was suddenly struck, from quite another direction, with what she considered a very brilliant idea.

"Rogers!" she exclaimed, with unusual animation, "I wonder if you could find me some flowers, if you were to go at once? Quite a large bunch, I want—roses, if you can get them. Do you think you can?"

"Yes, miss," replied Rogers, sedately. "It is not seven o'clock yet, and there is a very nice hot-house on the avenue, five or six blocks below here."

"Then please go—here is the money—" and she handed him a five-dollar note—"and if you can't get roses, take whatever they have that is prettiest—perhaps the daffodils and snowdrops have come."

The evident pleasure with which the old man received

the commission added to Muriel's sense of enjoyment of this, her first actual extravagance since extravagance had been within her power; for, liberally as her grandfather had provided for her in other respects, he had never permitted her to exceed her allowance of pocket-money, not so much from parsimony, as because he had honestly believed that generosity, in this respect, could have only a bad effect upon her, and, although she had often, since her visiting among poor people began, been so circumstanced as to feel the deprivation acutely, she had never been able to bring herself to the point of "asking for more."

Rogers returned in an incredibly short time, with a cluster of half-blown rosebuds, dark-red, golden-yellow, pure white, and blush, which made it seem quite impossible that winter was still in possession of that part of the earth.

"Oh, the lovely, lovely things!" exclaimed Muriel, rapturously, as she took them from his hand.

"They was pretty dear, miss," said Rogers, deprecatingly, "that what you gave me was just 'zactly right, the man said, after I'd picked these out, and I didn't take but three of each kind!"

"Oh, well, I suppose that's because it is so late in the season," said Muriel, carelessly, "I am sure they could not be lovelier. Just ask Margery to give you some sort of glass bowl, please, Rogers, and fill it with lukewarm water."

Rogers departed, wondering.

"Times is changed, indeed!" he muttered to himself, as he closed the door.

Muriel was still hovering over the bowl of roses, tenderly adjusting them in different positions, when May and Miss Bowne were ushered in. She had given orders that they should be brought directly to the library. The flowers served as an introductory topic, but Muriel soon saw that her second "ordeal" was as little to be dreaded as the first

had proved, and before the evening was over she had fallen into the snare which had captured so many people, and addressed Miss Bowne as "Aunt Sally" as naturally as possible! The old lady was greatly pleased, as she always was when this tribute was paid unconsciously, and would not allow Muriel to apologize, and May was scarcely less gratified. She had set her heart upon the plan of inducing Miss Bowne to live, at least for the present, with Muriel, but, eager as she was to suggest, and then further the idea, she was too wise to be over-eager, and nothing was said about it that evening. Of her puzzled state of mind Muriel did talk a little, and Miss Bowne, without knowing that any one else had made the same suggestion, said that it seemed to her that all Muriel could do, just now, was to wait, and keep her eyes open.

"There are different ways of waiting," continued Miss Bowne, "some folks wait sitting down, and make themselves so comfortable that they're not very keen-sighted for chances to do any thing else; and then they're very apt to say that there are no chances, and that luck is against them! And others wait booted and spurred, so to speak, and all ready to spring into the first empty saddle that comes by. There's no such thing as luck! That's a word that has lost its head, and ought to get it back again and be called pluck!"

"But doesn't it seem," said Muriel, with a little hesitation, "as if some people had more ways and chances of doing good put in their paths than others have?"

"They may seem to, but they don't, really," replied Miss Bowne, with a cheerful decision, which sometimes carried conviction, but which did not, quite, in this case.

"If a poor person, for instance, thinks she has no chance to do tangible good," she continued, "she forgets one thing she could always do, and that is, be a sort of broker

between the people in need of help and those who have help to give. But there's where a false pride often steps in —they're afraid of being rebuffed, and it seems so much like begging for themselves, and so it goes, when, often enough, rich people are glad to be told of what they call 'deserving cases,' though that's a term I don't like, for I can't help wondering where some of us would be if we were really to get our deserts."

The girls both laughed, more at Aunt Sally's manner than at what she said, and Muriel responded quickly :

" I'm so glad you feel that way, Aunt Sally. You see I don't mean to go back to ' Miss Bowne '—for so often, it seems to me, the people who suffer most terribly are just the very ones who, to use a cant expression, ' have themselves to thank for it.' You know that verse in ' A Comforter—'

> ' If you break your plaything yourself, dear,
> Don't you cry for it all the same?
> I don't think it is such a comfort.
> One has only oneself to blame,'

and I never could see why people should not be helped up, because they had slipped down, instead of being knocked down."

" Nor I either," said May, warmly. " Aunty and I often talk about that. Of course there are, I suppose, incorrigibles who slip down on purpose to be helped up, but more often, I think, a helping hand held out might save the poor souls from all future slips, and set them firmly on their feet."

Aunt Sally nodded approvingly.

" Yes," she said, " I know plenty of cases where the very shame of having slipped, that would have dragged them still lower if they'd been left to themselves, helped to hold them up, and make them strong. You know Marion Wood-

side, May—at least you've heard me talk enough about her to know her—she's one of my numerous nieces, Miss Douglas. When her servant married and left her, three or four years ago, she took a woman who drank—not all the time, but every few days; a woman who, but for that, was as nice a body, and as good a cook as you'd wish to see, but she'd lost place after place, and her sprees were coming oftener, and it really did not look as if she had a chance left. Marion put some little extra touches in her servants' room—it was nice enough before—and she bought a small brown coffee-pot, and a small black tea-pot, and when the poor soul came, Marion showed her all about, as if she'd been company, and last of all, she said :

"'Now Hannah, I know just how hard it will be, as well as any body, beside your Saviour and yourself, can know, and I want you to promise me only one thing—whenever you feel the craving, no matter what you are doing, make yourself at once a nice cup of tea or coffee—these little pots are just for you—and while you are making it say a prayer for help over the hard place.' And if you'll believe me, that woman, whom nobody would have in her house, had but one slip, after Marion took her, and her mortal shame over that has been, with God's help, the rock of her safety ever since."

There were tears in Muriel's eyes, as she said, "how very, very happy your niece must be! and how beautiful it was in her to take that poor woman whom nobody else would have! I have had so much time for thinking since I left school, that I have gone over and over again a sort of plan for fighting intemperance, which I think I could carry out, if I might only find the right sort of help. I don't know whether you ever read an absurd, delightful book by Besant and Rice, called 'All Sorts and Conditions of Men?'"

"Yes, indeed!" said Aunt Sally and May both at once, and the former added:

"I like a good novel, once in awhile, it sort of freshens me up, and Jack Osborne—he's one of my 'nephews,' and an artist—brought me that book when I was shut in the house with a cold. I read it twice over, and felt as if it ought to be read aloud in the public squares. And by the way, my dear, there's another notion for you—why can't the charitable people hire some of the poor clerks and such-like, who are out of employment, to sit in the squares and public gardens, and read out loud? I don't mean to rant and declaim, and attract a mob; it would take tact to manage it, as it does to manage any thing, for that matter; but just to sit down among a parcel of loafers and say, 'I've a nice bright little story here I'd like to read aloud, if any body will listen to me.' And then he might read 'Ten Times one is Ten,' or 'Laddie,' or any one of three or four dozen short stories that find people's hearts, and wake the poor souls up and get them to talk back, and send them home with something to think of! Now May! I'd rather have you laugh outright, than in that wicked way with your eyes! Why don't you pull me up when I go off like that? My children always do—oh, very politely, of course, but still, they do it!"

"I didn't wish to pull you up, dear," replied May, laughing a little, since she had permission; "I love to hear you digress; you say some of your very best things in that way, and I think the idea of the readers is capital. I'll talk to aunty about it, and we'll both wish we had thought of it ourselves. Every body loves a good story, I think, and I wish fiction could be utilized more than it is, as an agent of reform. In *our* Palace of Delight we will have two rooms, one for the men and one for the women, and a professional story teller in each room."

"Now I shall pull *you* up, Miss Douglas," said Muriel, smiling at May, "for I really do wish to hear what Miss Bowne thinks about my nebulous idea, and it has so many stars in it! Do you think it would be at all possible, Aunt Sally, to have some such place—a lovely warm, cheerful, homelike place, where they might learn to make homes for themselves?"

"My dear, I do!" replied Aunt Sally with her usual energy. "But my idea would be, instead of having one palace, to have four or five—mansions, we might call them, all under one chief manager, but each with a separate sub-manager. And I'd plant them in the very worst neighborhoods, where there were the most liquor-saloons. I do believe if the temperance people, and all the other reformers would go at the work of substitution, they might shut up two-thirds of the saloons, and empty three-fourths of the prisons, in ten years!"

Then, with a sudden change of tone, she exclaimed:

"Here I've been waiting to hear that clock strike nine, and it doesn't strike at all, and if it did, it would be striking ten—"

"And at ten o'clock, as we all know, who have the honor of your acquaintance," interrupted May, saucily, "the coach turns to a pumpkin, and the horses to mice. Hurry, Aunt Sally, hurry, before Muriel discovers what you really are!"

"Oh, please—must you really go? The evening seems only just begun!" pleaded Muriel; but Aunt Sally was inexorable.

"My dear," she said, "I find example is better than precept where young people are concerned, and I'm trying to give my young people a fair share of health and strength, as it's about all the capital they'll have; and as they're obliged to rise early, I get them off to bed, as nearly as I

can, at ten o'clock, though I'll not deny that it's 'quite a little cross,' as Sister Frances said, sometimes. But I don't mean that this shall be our last meeting, by a long shot, and I hope you don't, either, so we will only say good-night, and not good-by, and you must come and see me very soon. My young folks are coming to see you to-morrow evening, if you'll let them, and then I hope we shall all be comfortable friends. I don't like acquaintances very much. Good-night."

She had been putting on her wraps as she spoke, and now she took both Muriel's hands in a close, firm clasp, and kissed her with a motherly warmth, which brought tears once more to the eyes of the lonely girl. May bent for one more sniff at the fragrant roses, and Muriel, seizing her opportunity, stepped forward, and began to disengage more than half from the rest, remarking, as she did so:

"Will it be too much trouble for you to take some of these to your aunt for me, dear?"

May's eyes sparkled with pleasure. She knew how Miss Forsythe craved the flowers which, in winter, were quite beyond her reach.

"Too much trouble! No, indeed!" she replied, warmly. "But, Muriel, you're taking nearly all—do leave some for yourself!"

"I am leaving plenty for myself, ma'am—see! There are two of you, and there's only one of me, you know!"

And the light laugh ended in a little sigh, as Muriel twisted some soft paper about the stems of three-fourths of her roses. Then the final good-nights were said, the offer of Rogers as a "squire of dames" was gratefully but firmly declined, because, as Aunt Sally said, the street-cars passed the nearest corner, and would take first May, and then herself, almost to their very doors, and Muriel was left alone in the library, which, so cheerful a few minutes before,

now seemed empty and desolate by contrast. She tried to interest herself in a book, but failed. Then she glanced at the clock. It was only a quarter past ten ; she put the rest of her roses and smilax into a small vase which stood on the mantel-piece, and then went up stairs, and walked softly to the door of Miss Post's sitting-room. A bright light shone over the transom, so she knocked, and was bidden to come in.

"There's nothing the matter," she said, smiling at the anxiety which showed through Miss Post's gentle smile, "but I thought perhaps my roses would not look so fresh by morning—these hot-house flowers wither so soon—and so I brought them up to-night, but I should not have knocked, if I had not seen a light over your door. See—aren't they pretty?"

"They are lovely, lovely!" said Miss Post, fervently. "Did you bring them to me? How kind! I do enjoy those plants in the window so—you can't think, Miss Muriel! I haven't had a flower this winter, till I came here. And these seem as if it must be summer somewhere. I was trying to read my chapter, but I think I must need stronger glasses ; I must see about it to-morrow. I know this is good print, but I find it harder and harder to read at night."

"May I read it to you to-night?" and Muriel took the well-worn Bible from the table, and opened it where a faded card-board marker lay. "Is this it? The twelfth chapter of Hebrews?"

"Yes, that is it, and I shall be so much obliged," said Miss Post, gratefully. "I'm always glad when I come to the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Hebrews," she added · "they seem to put new life and strength into me. And if you're not sleepy, or in a hurry, Miss Muriel, would you mind reading both? I don't think they were ever meant to be separated, but my eyes gave out last night entirely."

"I shall not mind at all," said Muriel, smiling. "I like to read aloud; Miss Willis says it is a much-neglected accomplishment, and she drilled us well in it."

So Muriel read those stirring, trumpet-like words, and Miss Post listened, with a pleasure as eager and fresh as if they were quite new to her; or rather, with that far deeper happiness which comes of long acquaintance; and then most friendly good-nights were exchanged, and Muriel went cheerfully to her room and to bed, first making a memorandum—"A lamp like the one in the library for Miss Post's sitting-room. Oculist."

"Would it be much trouble for you to take care of another lamp, Margery?" asked Muriel, the next morning, as she stood, all ready for a flight into the region of shops.

"Not more than I could manage, Miss Muriel," replied Margery, dryly, but she added, presently:

"I was about asking you if there could not be a better light for that good lady's sitting-room. The drop-light is over high to read by, and flickers beyond a bit, and to my mind, a lamp is better than all your gas, if it's properly cared for. And there's some kind of a new burner they have now, that gives even a better light than our library-lamp does—they'll know in the shop; I can't recall the name just now."

"Margery, you'd have been burnt for a witch, if you'd lived a hundred years ago!" and Muriel laughed brightly. "Pray, how did you know that the lamp was for Miss Post's room?"

"How would I not know? I didn't think you'd be wanting to light up the parlor, and spend your evenings there!" And Margery smiled in the slow, reluctant, rather grim manner which seemed to deprecate the light-mindedness of smiling at all.

"Miss Muriel," she began, as Muriel turned to go, "if

you'll not think me meddling—she had a canary-bird last winter that somebody gave her because it was ailing, and he was tired of caring for it, and just as she thought she had it cured, it died, and to hear her talk you'd think it was a baby, at the very least; and she says to think how it would have thriven in that sunny window among the flowers."

"Oh, Margery," replied Muriel, "I always hate to see caged birds—it seems so unnatural."

"That may be," said Margery, tranquilly. "It was not in your room, nor yet in the library I thought it would be kept, and I have heard that a bird born and brought up in a cage neither asks nor knows better."

"Is there any thing else?" asked Muriel, with such meekness that Margery gave her first a keen and then a withering glance and stalked away. Nothing so roused her as a hint that she was "forgetting her place," and Muriel flew after her and made her peace, unwilling to leave the house under the cloud of her old nurse's displeasure.

The suggestion about the canary bird and her own reluctance to give a pleasure which she herself could not appreciate as such, gave Muriel food for thought all the way into Boston, until she smiled to herself, recollecting the "Duchess."

"I am growing just like the 'Duchess,'" she soliloquized, "with my 'the moral of that is,' to every thing I hear and see!"

But the canary-bird, in a resplendent cage, was bought, and the child-like pleasure, fresh every day, of its proud possessor, kept the lesson likewise fresh in the giver's mind, and turned the unconscious canary into an active and useful home missionary.

The lamp bought, too, was a very pretty one, with the newest and brightest burner. An oculist, noted for his success in difficult cases, was called on and induced to make

an appointment for the following day. Muriel went to the best hot-house in Boston and engaged a supply of cut flowers, to be sent regularly every other day, feeling, as she did so, that she was making a sort of engagement with herself to find candidates for them. Then, well satisfied with her morning's work, she decided to lunch at a cheerful-looking restaurant upon which she happened, rather than go home to her solitary meal in the library.

She had given her order, and was absorbed in a new magazine, when a very pleasant voice said :

" Good-morning, Miss Douglas. Shall I be intruding upon you if I take this chair ? " and looking up she recognized Mr. Keith, who stood, hat in hand, deferentially awaiting her permission to seat himself in the chair opposite her own. She was glad to see him, as people generally were, and her " Not at all ! " was so evidently sincere that he sat down promptly, well pleased with his reception. His father's office was nearly opposite the restaurant, but it never crossed Muriel's mind that his sudden appearance was any thing more than a very ordinary co-incidence. Indeed, although she knew the street and number of the office, her thoughts had been upon such different matters, as she walked, that she had failed to remember it, or to see the modest sign which would have recalled it to her. The half-hour which followed was a pleasant one for Muriel, and, judging by his manner, extremely so for Mr. Keith. He was a good listener, as well as a good talker, and when Muriel, intending to be very cautious, began by asking a few questions upon points connected with her " nebulous " scheme, he drew her on, and that without asking one impertinent question, until, when she recalled the interview, she was somewhat dismayed to find that she had talked with him about it nearly as freely as she had talked with Miss Bowne and May the evening before. But why, she questioned herself, should

she feel any dismay? It would be necessary, before putting any of her theories into practice, to apply to the firm for the requisite money, and to so old a friend and adviser as the elder Mr. Keith, it would be discourteous, to say the least of it, not to give an outline of her plans. Besides, his knowledge of men and things would be a great help to her utter ignorance and inexperience. That ghost of a derisive smile which had so troubled Muriel at their first interview, did not appear to-day.

Mr. Douglas Keith was an apt reader of faces much more opaque as to expression than Muriel's was, or ever would be, and perhaps he had seen a reflection in her countenance which served him as a warning. Be that as it may, his face showed only a respectful attention and most friendly interest as Muriel spoke more freely of her aims and wishes. He made one slightly false step, but quickly retracted it. When Muriel spoke of buying three or four old buildings, or building lots, in parts of the city which would be suitable for her purpose, he replied with a slight hesitation which somehow made what he said seem more important :

"You would, I suppose, Miss Douglas, wish to do only such things with the property as your grandfather, were he still living, would approve and sanction?"

Muriel was silent a moment, and her silence was so misconstrued that her reply, when it came, took her auditor by surprise. She was debating with herself as to how much she might safely and honorably tell concerning the wishes last expressed by her grandfather, and the question was a difficult one, for she could not bear the thought of seeming to blame him.

"You are quite right," she said at last; "my grandfather gave me, if not exactly instructions, at least suggestions, concerning the use of the property, upon which I am trying to act; but he left all arrangements, as to detail, wholly in

my hands, so that you can imagine also, perhaps, how anxious I am to justify his confidence in me. I think your father, who was with my grandfather several times during the last week of his life, will quite understand this, and I rely upon his sympathy, as well as upon his judgment, for which my grandfather had always a very high regard."

"I hope you will pardon me, Miss Douglas," said Mr. Keith, so humbly that Muriel at once relented, "if my interest in your welfare has made me seem impertinent. When you have lived as long in this wicked world as I have, you will perhaps—but no, I doubt if you are ever thoroughly convinced of the wickedness of the world. You will find, however, this much—that charity is an edge-tool, which needs most careful handling—"

"And children should not meddle with edge-tools?" interrupted Muriel, with a little smile, which somewhat disconcerted Mr. Keith and made him forget his peroration. "You are very kind," she added, "but I think you need not be alarmed. I shall do nothing, absolutely nothing of any magnitude, without first consulting your father, and I promise to be guided by his advice for at least a year, perhaps even longer, for I do not learn any thing very rapidly, and I feel my ignorance more and more every day. And now I must say good morning, for I have still several errands to do before going home."

Mr. Keith rose and held out his hand, saying, with a frank smile:

"You have put me in my place, Miss Douglas, and I hope I shall be wise enough to stay there. Good-morning."

And to her great relief he made no offer to accompany her to the counter where the checks and money were taken. She had been vaguely fearful that he would try to pay for her lunch, which evidenced the slightness of her acquaintance with him. He would have, not tried, but simply

done it, in most cases, but he had already, small as his opportunities had been, taken the measure of her character quite too well for that. And this trifling indication of his estimate of her did much to atone for the mistake he had made a few minutes before; for, as she reflected, the mistake was, after all, a natural one, which almost any one in his place would have made. Almost? She wished she might believe it were not quite!

CHAPTER V.

TAKING IT PATIENTLY.

"They roused him with jam and judicious advice."
"*Hunting of the Snark.*"

MURIEL would have felt greatly pleased and cheered, the evening before, had she known how nearly her cause was won with Aunt Sally, before the first blow had been struck. It had not crossed the old lady's mind that she might be called upon to help the young girl with her half-formed plans, excepting as any outside-standing friend might help her; but she did hope very earnestly that this vast "opportunity" might be properly handled and made the most of. May was in such high spirits at the result of the introduction, that Aunt Sally accused her of being "fey," and advised her to "comb herself down."

"My scholars will do it for me to-morrow, dear," said May, cheerfully; "so let me disport myself while I may. I am so pleased that you and Muriel made such a good impression on each other—you see, I felt very responsible for both of you!"

"How do you know we did?" queried Miss Bowne, abruptly.

"Now, Aunt Sally, affectation is dreadfully unbecoming to you. You wouldn't have kissed her good-night in a manner which fairly roused my jealousy, and she would not have fallen to calling you 'Aunt Sally," with that sweet

unconscious kind of grace, if the mutual impression had not been all I could wish."

"I do like her, and that's a fact," said Aunt Sally, peaceably, "I could not help thinking, as I sat there, how few girls would have stood the test of suddenly-acquired wealth, as she seems to be standing it. I noticed how simply she was dressed, and, dear knows, her being in black don't account for that, in these days! and how the library looked, as if it might be exactly as her grandfather left it—no knick-knacks and foolishnesses scattered about. And her one thought about her money seems to be how she may do the most good with it. But it's most terribly lonely for the child, all by herself in that great house—it isn't right, May, she ought to have some one to stay with her; hasn't she any relatives that wouldn't make her too miserable?"

"I am afraid not," said May, laughing at this unique way of putting it; "I don't think her great-aunts, the Misses Gordon, you know, would be at all congenial with her, from the little I know of them, and besides, they have a nice little home of their own, and it is hardly likely that they would wish either to give that up, or to separate. She needs somebody who will really and actively sympathize with her in her efforts to do good with all that money, and at the same time keep her from feeling morbidly responsible. But she is not exactly alone—she has taken dear Miss Post for her permanent seamstress, and given her two nice sunny rooms in the back building; I wish you could hear the dear old lady talk about it! It's like a real little home of her own, at last, for Muriel let her bring all the furniture she cared for, and she has her meals in her sitting-room, with the understanding that she is always at liberty to invite her friends either to eat or sleep with her. That little stroke of good common sense on Muriel's part, pleased me. It seemed kinder, on the face of it, to have Miss Post at her own table,

but the dear soul has lived alone so long, that I know she would have found it embarrassing, and she hates late dinners, too——"

"Sensible woman!" interjected Aunt Sally—

"And don't think her early dinner is worth eating, no matter how sumptuous it may be, if she can't have a cup of tea with it. You must call on her, when you go there again, and hear her expatiate upon her undeserved good fortune—and Muriel! And then, you know, Muriel has that delightful, grim old Scotchwoman, who watches over her like an affectionate dragon. And I have an idea that the vacant rooms of that great house will fill up, not suddenly, and in a way to be repented of, but in ways of which it will warm one's heart to hear."

"It's a queer thing," said Aunt Sally, musingly, "a very queer thing, when you come to think of it, how we all behave, as if that commandment about the 'two coats' was a dead letter, and I never could see why it should be. There's no reason so far as I can see, why we mayn't have pretty things, and pleasant things, if we'd only be willing to share them. But here's your corner, May—you're sure you're not afraid? Well, run along then, childie—it's only four doors, to be sure—and good-night, and thank you?"

"Thank *you*, you mean! Good-night, Aunt Sally." And May stepped off the car, and reached her door without being kidnapped, while Aunt Sally went home to sound Muriel's praises, and tell her children that they must be just as friendly with her, when they went to call, the next evening, as they would if she were poor.

They were—or very nearly so. And although Muriel, feeling a little embarrassed, did not show quite to such good advantage as she had shown to Aunt Sally alone, they were much pleased with her, and responded with frank pleasure to her timid overtures. Dick, especially, approved of her,

although, when Marion mischievously cornered him for his reasons for the sudden liking, he could give no very coherent statement.

"Well, she looked as if she wasn't thinking about herself," he said, at last, "and she seemed really and truly to be interested about the farm, and—oh, hang it, Marion, you can see for yourself, that she's very different from those idiots who sometimes come to see Alice and you, and who call me 'Mr. Raymond.' She called me Dick right off, and then laughed and apologized a little and said she'd rather if I didn't mind. *She* doesn't want to pretend I'm a young man, and try to flirt with me!"

"Don't try to be cynical, dear," said Marion, "it is not becoming to you. The idiots, probably, in the goodness of their hearts, do as they'd be done by, and as they honestly think you'd like to be done by. But I'm quite willing to admit that she seems to be a nice, frank, sensible creature, and I hope we shall be good friends."

"But we musn't be too friendly all at once, Marion," said Alice, gently. "Remember how rich she is and how poor we are. I shouldn't like her to think we were influenced by that."

"Now, Alice," began Dick, impetuously; but Marion laid a warning hand upon his arm and he stopped abruptly.

"I don't think there is any danger of her misconstruing our motives," said Marion; "she looks too sincere herself to doubt the sincerity of other people, and I am 'free to confess,' as Aunt Sally says, that I am looking forward to helping her spend some of her money. I see so many, many cases, where a little money, judiciously spent, would do such a vast deal of good; and I don't think I shall be afraid to ask her when I know her a little better. And, if she did but know it, that's a very great compliment."

Aunt Sally listened eagerly to all her children had to say

about Muriel, and they could see that she was a little disappointed with their impression of her.

"We haven't all your gift, dear," said Marion, laughing at the expression of her face; "we only see people in their every-dayness, while you are all the time coming

> 'Out on the other side the novel
> Silent silver lights and darks undreamed o'.'

"But she doesn't 'hush and bless herself with silence' about them," said Dick saucily, atoning for his insinuation with a hug that left Aunt Sally breathless.

Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Mr. and Mrs. Craig called upon Muriel very soon afterward, and a warm liking sprang up at once among them all for her—a liking which was quite as warmly returned, and which, to Muriel's over-shadowed heart and life, was like the "clear shining after rain."

She questioned with herself as to whether she should return these friendly visits, or forego the pleasure for which she longed until she had fulfilled a year of ceremonial "mourning" for her grandfather; and at last, puzzled by the conflict between her wishes and fears, referred the case to May.

"Yon see, May," she said wearily, as if she were rehearsing an oft-told tale, "it seems to me sometimes, that just because grandpapa and I did not love each other better while he lived, I ought to be all the more careful to do nothing which would look like a reflection on his memory."

"Yes, I see what you mean," said May, thoughtfully, "and I suppose it is natural that you should feel so; and, of course, I should think it strange if you were to wish to go into gay society immediately; but, Muriel, don't you think that your power for doing good will be increased if you make friends with these nice people and visit them quietly, instead of just passively waiting for all the overtures of friendship to come from them?"

"Yes," said Muriel, honestly, "I do; and I do not think that grandpapa himself would wish me to do any thing, or keep from doing any thing, as a mere matter of ceremony, any more than he wished me to wear 'crape mourning.' The fact is, I believe, that I am afraid of—comments. It is dreadful to be so cowardly; but oh, May, you don't know how tired I was before I had established my position about wearing black instead of 'mourning,' and about keeping on living here, instead of boarding or visiting for my living. And I know I shall be dealt with if I visit at all, for at least six months, no matter how quiet the visits are. I'm ashamed of myself, but there is the real truth."

"I don't wonder you're ashamed" said May, smiling and frowning both at once; "if you show any more signs of such alarming weakness, I shall be inclined to agree with the people who thought it would be better for you to go away somewhere! If that poor reason is your only one, I have no compassion for you at all. But this feeble-minded state must not last—you must brace up, and simply do what is for the best, and then take the consequences! The friendship of such people as the Osbornes and Craigs will more than repay you, I am quite sure."

"Please don't entirely annihilate me," said Muriel, meekly. "I will endeavor to 'brace up,' but you ought to remember that I have not your blessed gift of seeing just two sides of every thing—a wrong side and a right side. It's just because I am so anxious to secure the friendship of those nice people, and feel what an enjoyment it will be, that I have hesitated about the matter. If it had been something I disliked to do, I could have settled myself easily enough."

"You think I am fierce—you may be very thankful that you did not give Aunt Sally a chance to fall upon you in this matter!" said May with a little laugh at the thought. "'Pagan' would have been her mildest epithet for such

reasoning as that. Now just consider—is a duty any less a duty because it is something we like to do? And is it not a blessed thing that so many of our duties are capable of serving for pleasures as well? Yes, of course, it is! Aunty gave me a nice little rule for such cases—for your veiled sarcasm doesn't always fit me, I can tell you. She said, whenever one is halting between two opinions because a duty seems merely a self-gratification, one need merely ask the question, 'would I do this if all the pleasure for myself were taken out of it?' I think a candid answer to that question would usually settle the matter."

"Yes, I suppose it would," said Muriel, thoughtfully, "and May, do you know I am beginning to think you ought to be a better girl, even, than you are, with the advantages you've had?"

"Don't say 'even,'" said May, with sudden and genuine humility. "Whenever I look at Aunt Agnes, and then at myself, impartially, I wonder how I have the face to talk to any body as I talk to you. It seems like such colossal self-conceit."

"You shall not talk to me that way," said Muriel, affectionately, "however else you may talk. When I think you are self-conceited, I will let you know."

Muriel did "brace up" after this discussion with May, and went, in a few days, to return the two calls which had given her so much pleasure. She was more than ever charmed with Rose Osborne, and delighted with the "flat" of five rooms, in which the young couple lived.

"I dare not call Jack," said Rose, laughing a little, "for I know he will come, and he is really very busy to-day, finishing something he hates—a commission. I can't make him see the black ingratitude of hating a commission; all I can do is to keep him from being distracted, and not let him

distract himself, and then he grumbles at me, and says I shall lose him all his friends."

"He is very ungrateful," said Muriel, with a sociableness which surprised herself, "and he must have an extremely unflattering opinion of his friends, if he thinks they will be lost so easily. But some day, when he is not under the ban of a commission, I hope he will let me see his studio, of which May Douglas has told me so much, and the sketches and 'studies' she thinks so charming."

"He will be delighted to do so, I know," replied Rose, cordially. "Let me see—to-day is Tuesday—can not you and May come and lunch with us, very informally, next Saturday? We lunch at one o'clock, and you will meet no one but our two selves and May; then you can have plenty of time to see the sketches and things—there are scores of them, for Jack is an indefatigable sketcher, whenever he goes, and I, of course, think them all admirable!"

"I will come, with much pleasure, if May will," said Muriel, after a moment's hesitation. "I know," she added, drawn on by Rose's friendly face and manner, "that it is not usual for people to visit so soon after a loss—after a death in one's immediate family, but grandpapa was not like a great many people. He spoke, shortly before his death, about his intense dislike of so-called 'mourning,' and it seems to me that all the other forms and ceremonies come under the same head. I do not see how people can feel like going into any very gay place or company soon after a death—any death—in the house, but when I thought of shutting myself up with myself for a year, or even six months, it seemed to me so dreadful, and I feel so in need of friends—"

She stopped abruptly, afraid of saying too much, but Rose, who had heard much of her history from May, quite understood.

"I think you are right, dear," she said, taking Muriel's hand as she spoke. "Surely, we can mourn as truly for our dead without making other people share in our mourning, and while we live our duty is to the living. I was very glad when I found that you did not mean utterly to seclude yourself for any prescribed time. You see both May and Aunt Sally have talked so much about you that I feel as if I knew you quite well, and I am so much interested in what Aunt Sally calls your 'opportunities!'"

An hour of happy talking followed, and when at length Muriel rose to go, she said:

"I will not apologize for making a visit of my very first call, Mrs. Osborne, for you have kept me from realizing that I was doing it!"

"And I may bring Jack to see you one evening this week?" said Rose; "then he will forgive me, perhaps, for not calling him to-day."

When Muriel looked at her watch on the way down in the elevator, she found that it was quite too late to make her call upon Mrs. Craig that day, and so returned home, with a feeling of warmth and happiness in her heart, which shone from her face, and made Margery exclaim:

"You've left a year or two somewhere in the street, Miss Muriel!"

If she had, it found her again next morning. She was in the library, as usual, and was rewarding herself for a careful and business-like entry in her memorandum-book, by touching up her plan for the conservatory. She did not mean to have it begun for two or three months, partly because she wished to know just how much money she might reasonably devote to it, and partly because she kept thinking of improvements and additions to her original plan, and enjoyed working at it. She could not help being amused herself at the manner in which she made a favorite plaything

of this plan, taking it up whenever she felt especially tired or annoyed.

"I suppose we keep on playing with dolls all our lives," she mused, "only we change the dolls—and not always for the better—as we grow older, and, as we imagine, wiser."

Her planning and philosophizing were alike cut short by the announcement that Mrs. Hardcastle was in the parlor. Rogers could not have been induced to call it the drawing-room, so it was a fortunate thing that Muriel had no prejudice in favor of the more stately name.

Muriel scolded herself roundly, on her way to the parlor, for the cowardly feeling of dismay which was taking possession of her. She had had no such feeling, under the previous attacks which had been made upon her, but not all May's common sense, nor her own determination, had enabled her to shake off the idea that she was, perhaps, merely indulging her own wishes at the expense of a natural and proper sentiment on the part of others.

"'Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just,'" she said to herself, resolutely, "and I *will* believe in the justness of my position. May, with her clear head and kind heart can not, surely, be so utterly mistaken."

"How very well you are looking, my dear," said Mrs. Hardcastle, after the first greetings had been exchanged. "I was really afraid, after the long strain under which you were so sweetly patient, that there would be a terrible reaction. But a tranquil temperament is certainly a great blessing. I hope I did not interrupt you in any thing—you must have so much to attend to, poor child. Can't I go where you were sitting, and not keep you here?"

"I was not at all busy," said Muriel, smiling in spite of herself, "and there is no reason why I should not be kept here, thank you. Are uncle and the girls quite well?"

"Quite, thanks; and Julia has had a great deal to say about her delightful little visit to you the other day. You must have made yourself extremely agreeable!"

"No, if any body made me agreeable, it was she herself," said Muriel. "She is so very bright, that even a stupid person can't help responding a little. I wish she would come again."

"She is hoping to have her visit returned, my dear, for, of course, while it would not be at all proper, under the circumstances, for you to do any general visiting, coming to such near relations as we are would not count. And, however careful one may be, ill-natured people will talk. For instance, I was told this morning, by an indefatigable news-collector of my acquaintance, that you went yesterday to call upon Mrs. Osborne, the artist's wife, and although I assured her that there must be some mistake, she was so positive that she was right, that I came straight to you for authority to contradict her." Mrs. Hardcastle paused with a keen, questioning look at Muriel.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Aunt Matilda," said Muriel, feeling that her manner was stiffening as she spoke, "but for once your gossiping informant told the truth. I did call on Mrs. Osborne yesterday, in return for a very pleasant call from her; and I intended going to see Mrs. Craig, who also called on me, too, but I stayed so long with Mrs. Osborne that there was not time."

"My dear Muriel," said Mrs. Hardcastle, looking genuinely shocked and disturbed, "if you have no feeling yourself about this matter, I wish you would consent to consider the feelings of other people. I have successfully accounted for the singular stand which you took about mourning, so successfully, that I have actually heard you praised, instead of blamed for it; but nothing that I, or any one else, can say, will account satisfactorily for such a line of conduct as you

are pursuing now. Remember, it is barely a month since your grandfather died, and when you owe him so much—"

Mrs. Hardcastle paused, as if words were wholly inadequate to express her feelings, and Muriel took advantage of the pause to begin her defense.

"I am sorry to have annoyed you, Aunt Matilda," she said ; "but, perhaps, if you will look at the matter impartially, you will admit that there is no cause for annoyance. I have not the slightest intention of going into general society, or any sort of gayety, or of doing any thing disrespectful to grandpapa's memory ; but I can talk to you about this as I could not to any one outside the family, for you know enough of what went before to understand. Grandpapa never loved me. I fancied, just at the last, that he was learning to love me a little, but I have concluded, since his death, that I was mistaken. He merely turned to me, as he would have turned to any one, because he felt that he was dying. He told me, as you know, his views about so-called 'mourning,' and it seems to me that this comes under the same head. My life has been very lonely, very friendless, compared with the lives of most girls of my age. This was not my fault ; it was in deference to grandpapa's wishes. I know from several things which he said, at the last, that he felt he had been mistaken. I have never told you of these things, because I was afraid you would not understand ; but I know he thought that, if he might have another chance, he would make his life very different from what it had been. And I can not think that, if he might know about it, he would wish me to forego such real and valuable friends as the Raymonds and Osbornes and Craigs seem inclined to be to me. I shall do nothing conspicuous, nothing that is really disrespectful to grandpapa, but I feel as if I could not go on living the shut-in life of the past few months, now that there is no longer

any necessity for it. And while, as I said, it grieves me to annoy you, I must use my own judgment about some things, and I think we shall be better friends if we avoid useless discussion."

Mrs. Hardcastle was a kind-hearted woman, and although she could not, generally speaking, be called a wise one, she had what her older daughter called "streaks of wisdom" in her character, which sometimes stood her in good stead, and one of these streaks, coupled with a real pity for Muriel, came to her rescue now.

"My dear," she said, with sudden tears in her eyes, "I must have been blind not to see what an ordeal you were passing through, and I hope I should be the last person in the world to wish to deprive you of happiness now; it is just because, after a little while, when you begin to go into society, public opinion will have so much to do with your popularity that I am anxious to guard you from making mistakes now. Surely these new friends of yours could be made to understand that, while you are not visiting, you will be glad to receive their visits. But I have laid the whole matter before you now, and there is nothing more that I can do about it, so I will say no more. I have a message from Julia for you; she wants you—and we all do—to come to-morrow for the day and night. You will, will you not? There will be no one else there, of course, and your uncle counts upon the visit; he is so dreadfully busy just now that he does not get any time for visiting himself, so he told me to tell you that he is an old man now, and it is your duty to come and see him."

"Thank you, said Muriel, "I shall like to come very much. It is kind of you to want me. Give my love to Julia, please, and tell her I will come with much pleasure."

Mrs. Hardcastle rose to go, but the ordeal was not quite over yet.

"I hear you are talking of adding a conservatory to the house," she said, as she moved slowly toward the door. "It would be very delightful, of course, but, my dear, I wonder if you have any idea of the expenses into which one is led, if one attempts to have so much as a bow-window built? Pray consider the matter well, before undertaking it."

"I will," said Muriel, in a manner which cut short all further discussion of the question, and of which she was afterward ashamed. But she was indignant, too, for when she thought the matter over, puzzled as to how her aunt had discovered her intention, she was forced—or thought she was—to the conclusion that Julia had been the informer. They had talked about the matter, and Muriel once more blamed herself for her too great readiness, if not exactly to confide in people, at least to tell them much that it would be wiser not to tell. She had not bound Julia over to keep the peace about any of the numerous matters which they had discussed, but she felt that a real friend does not need any such injunction, and she made a hasty resolve to talk, henceforth, only upon the most commonplace subjects with her aunt and cousins. She brooded over the matter until she deeply regretted having accepted Julia's invitation, and was rejoiced to remember, what she had honestly forgotten when she did accept it, that she had promised to go with Miss Post, the next afternoon, for a second visit to the oculist, who, after making his examination, had not announced the result, but merely arranged to see his patient again. The appointment was for four o'clock, and as the office was on the opposite side of the city from Muriel's home, she decided that she had an all-sufficient excuse for retracting her promise to Julia. She wrote a brief note, which she vainly tried to make cordial, pleading the forgotten engagement, but somehow she did not feel very well satisfied with herself, and even went to the hall to take

back the note, that she might at least modify the language, if not her decision, but Rogers had already posted it, so she endeavored to convince herself that this settled the matter, and made farther thought about it useless. She really had forgotten the engagement, and what more was necessary? She resolved to take a long walk after lunch, for it was a bright, cheerful March day, with a brisk wind blowing, and she had recently decided that she did not take exercise enough, and was growing morbid.

She was just ready to leave her room when, somewhat to her dismay, "Miss Hardcastle's" card was brought to her. She went down with her bonnet on, and her gloves in her hand, and Julia said, almost immediately, as Muriel had hoped and expected that she would:

"You were just going out, weren't you? Do not let me keep you, it is such a pleasant day, after all the storms, that it really seems wrong to stay in the house."

"I was only going for a walk," said Muriel. "I had no engagement with any body but myself, I assure you"

"I meant to walk, too, after I had seen you," replied Julia, "I am making a point of walking at least two miles every day, now, and I feel a great deal better for it, already. If that is not too far for you, suppose we go together?"

"No, I expected to walk quite as far as that," said Muriel. "Which way were you going?"

"I had a sort of half-formed plan to explore that curious old burial-ground at Copp's Hill," replied Julia. "Papa was talking about it last night, and casually remarked that Kate and I ought to be ashamed of ourselves for knowing so little about the 'historic portions' of the city. I have only a very general idea as to where it is, but no doubt we can find it, if we're not too proud to ask our way of all we meet."

"We need not do that," said Muriel, "Uncle took me there once, ever so long ago, and it is worth seeing. We

can go a good deal of the way on Washington Street, and though I don't quite remember the names of the other streets, I am sure I shall know them when I see them. But we should have started earlier—uncle and I went most of the way in a street-car, and it seemed a long distance even then."

"Oh well, we can ride back if we find it is too late to walk. It's nice to have an object in view, even if one doesn't attain it."

Julia's manner had been easy and pleasant, as it always was, and she had not appeared to notice Muriel's constraint, but as soon as they were in the street, she said:

"We were so sorry to find that you can not come, after all, to-morrow. Mamma received your note just before I started. But Muriel—my mind misgives me that you were very glad to remember that engagement, and I am afraid mamma bored you! Had she any especial mission, or was it merely on general principles?"

Julia's tone was so frank and friendly that Muriel found it impossible to be dignified. She even caught herself smiling at the unbiased and impartial manner in which "mamma's" daughter had stated the case, and the smile remained, as she said, "Aunt Matilda had two especial missions. She thinks it highly improper that I should visit any one outside the family, and she is alarmed at the idea of my 'building'—even to the small extent which a conservatory implies."

"Now, I should just like to know," said Julia, looking very much vexed, "who could have told mamma about your conservatory idea! I was particularly careful not to mention that at home, for I knew what the result would be, and I think you have suffered quite enough from 'judicious advice.' You see I really do think, once in awhile! Of course, you must have thought that it was I who told mam-

ma about your plan, and I don't at all wonder that the more you thought of it the less you wished to come. I do wish mamma could be made to understand, once for all, that she isn't responsible for you ! "

Julia's tone, as she said this, jarred upon Muriel more even than the words did ; but in spite of that, she was greatly pleased to find that Julia had not been Mrs. Hardcastle's informant, and said so. The subject was then dropped, apparently by mutual consent, but about half an hour later, Julia exclaimed abruptly :

" I have it ! It was Douglas Keith who told mamma about the conservatory. I remember all about it, now. I thought, at the time, that he didn't know what an ill turn he was doing you ! "

" Oh well ! " said Muriel, trying to speak lightly, but not succeeding very well, " 'what's done can't be helped,' and I will try and think no more about it. See, here is the old graveyard. Uncle said that when he was a boy some of the stones had bullet marks on them from Revolutionary times. I wish stones lasted in this country as they do in Egypt. I saw such a droll thing in the paper the other day about the obelisk ; it wasn't meant for a funny paragraph at all, but it said the obelisk had 'suffered more from the weather' in the short time since it came to this country, than it had in all its hundreds of years in Egypt ! There's a tribute to the great American climate for you ! "

It was so plain that Muriel wished no further discussion of her affairs, that Julia made no attempt to recur to the subject, and, as she was never at a loss for conversation if any one would do a very small amount of responding, the ride home was cheerful enough outwardly. It was quite too late for walking back, and Julia said she should be a little late for dinner, but would make her peace by talking antiquities to her father.

"Can't you come day after to-morrow for that visit, Muriel, since to-morrow is 'took up?'" she asked, as they were about to part.

And Muriel, afraid of seeming ungracious should she refuse, agreed to do so.

She decided, over her solitary dinner, that she was not at all pleased with Mr. Keith.

"I wonder if he discusses the affairs of all his clients with equal freedom," she said to herself. "I should not think he would have any long, if he does. I shall most certainly wait for his father the next time I want any information or advice."

"You've walked too far this afternoon, I doubt, Miss Muriel," said Margery, with a scrutinizing look at Muriel's face. She had come in on some pretext about the housekeeping, and was lingering, as if loath to leave her "bairn" alone.

"Perhaps I have," replied Muriel, smiling at Margery's anxious face, "but there's no damage done that a night's rest will not repair, so you needn't look so distressed about it. And, Margery, it isn't quite dark yet—I wish you'd take these flowers to that little lame boy you were telling me about yesterday, and try to find out if something can't be done for him—perhaps he can be cured."

"He's past that, I'm afraid," said Margery, seriously; "but he'll be glad enough of the flowers. Am I to take them all, Miss Muriel?"

"No; you can leave a few of the pansies and a little green, please. Take all the rest."

And as soon as Margery was gone Muriel gathered up the remnant of the flowers and sought Miss Post's room, with a hope, which she did not acknowledge even to herself, that something in the reading or talk would come home to her. She did not come upon any thing very special

in either, but Miss Post's peaceful, happy face, as she sat unconsciously stroking her lame hand, which had been very lame that day, sent her to bed calmed and comforted. Peace existed, of that there could be no doubt, and she would find it some day.

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING FRIENDS.

"The like will seek the like."

—E. B. Browning.

MURIEL and May had had more than one talk in their frequent meetings, on the subject of securing Aunt Sally as a companion for the former, and the best way of bringing this about, until at last Muriel declared that she was tired of waiting and considering; that nothing, so far as she could see, was gained by delay; and that she meant just to lay the whole case before Aunt Sally, and take the consequences.

"I suppose that will be best," said May, a little doubtfully, "but I have kept hoping that something would demonstrate to Aunt Sally the fitness of this 'mission' for her, before you actually asked the question. You see, I have had one or two rather severe lessons on picking things before they were ripe."

"That sounds very wise-like," said Muriel, laughing, "and you know I am generally as wax in your hands, but this time I feel inclined to go my own gait. The more I see of Aunt Sally, the more certain I feel that this will be the best way."

"Very well!" said May, resignedly, "but don't come to me for comfort, when you return a blighted being, from your too rash quest."

"If I return you mean. Indeed I shall, and you will give

it to me, too. I am going to-morrow afternoon just in time for them to ask me to stay to tea. Do you believe they will?"

"I do. Aunt Sally would ask the Prince of Wales to take off his overcoat and stay to tea, if he should happen along within half an hour of tea-time, much as she disapproves of him—and she does not disapprove of you, at all, but quite 'contrariwise.' Shall you make your attack in full family conclave and take the consequences?"

"I don't know. I can't tell beforehand. I shall just 'proceed as the way opens.'"

"You'll write me a line when you return? I'll let you use a postal-card this once, Muriel, for you need only say yes or no, and if Rogers posts it at once, I shall receive it before I go to school in the morning."

"What frightful inconsistency. You are morally certain of the result of my rashness, and yet you are willing to have a postal-card sent you in your eagerness to hear it. Well, I will write you the 'line,' but it will be upon a decent card, and in a decent envelope. When I find I haven't time to seal my envelopes, I shall employ a keeper of the seal."

Muriel decided to go upon her "quest" a little earlier than she had at first intended, the following afternoon, for after all, her acquaintance with the Raymonds was of such recent date, that it would perhaps be intrusive to stay to tea, even should she be invited. So she set forth soon after four o'clock, resolutely restraining herself from trying to arrange in her mind what she should say to Aunt Sally. Her heart was very much bent upon succeeding. The more she saw of Aunt Sally the more it seemed to her that this wise, experienced, energetic woman, with her large heart, and sound judgment, was the ideal prime minister for her small kingdom, and she tried to prepare her mind for the disappointment which a refusal would give her, while, at the same time, she counted up her chances of success.

Circumstances favored her in one way. Aunt Sally was entirely alone. Alice was spending the day with Rose, Marion and Dick had agreed to meet after school, and take as long a walk as their limited time permitted, and that it might be a little longer, Aunt Sally had magnanimously promised to postpone tea until half-past seven, for there was "a moon," and the spring-like air would make the early evening very pleasant.

"So now, my dear," she said, after she had explained the position to Muriel, "I'll not apologize to you for having nobody but myself to entertain you with, for I have wanted a chance for a right good talk with you, and we couldn't have a better. Take off your bonnet and whatever you call your wrap—I've lost the run of the things women wear now, and the outlandish names they give them—and if I can't give you a dinner, I can give you a good hearty tea, and it amounts to about the same thing, I reckon.

"Would you really like me to stay?" asked Muriel, hesitating a little, "I should love to, dearly, but wouldn't your nieces think——"

"If I wouldn't really like you to stay, I should not ask you, and Alice and Marion aren't very old yet, but they're pretty sensible for their ages, I think. Come, give me your things, child. This is a free settlement, and we do as we please here, so long as what we do doesn't worry any body else."

"That is very nice," said Muriel, laughing, "and I will stay with pleasure, but I am afraid I must go to the nearest district telegraph station, and send word for Rogers to come for me this evening, before I take my bonnet off. I didn't think to tell Margery where I was going."

"There is no need of that," said Aunt Sally, "Dick will like to take you home, if you will let him. He wants to be friends with you, and I'm always glad when a boy begins to

make girl-friends; it's both civilizing and enlightening for him! And you'll not find it any hardship, I think, to be friends with my boy!"

"Indeed I shall not!" said Muriel, warmly, and taking off gloves and bonnet as she spoke, "I like him so much, although I have only met him three or four times. I have always mourned over not having any brother; it must be such a comfort to have one—a nice one. And what struck me about Dick most particularly was, that although he is hardly out of the 'awkward age' yet, his manner to you, and to his sisters, is so very gentle and pleasant."

The deepest policy could not have inspired Muriel with a speech which would have made a more favorable impression than this perfectly artless one produced. Aunt Sally beamed as she replied:

"I wouldn't give much for a boy who kept all his good manners for outsiders. And I've long had a theory that there need not be any 'awkward age,' at least not one that will annoy other people. Of course, a boy who has never been anywhere, or seen any thing to speak of will feel awkward at times, and will not always do and say the right thing at the right time, but after all, right feeling and unselfishness will give a better manner than any amount of veneering and varnishing. Now, if the girls were here, they'd be laughing at me. They think I'm foolish about Dick, and may be I am, we are not apt to know our own foolishnesses, but you see, he is the youngest, and I feel as if I'd had some hand in bringing him up. But I'm not going to say another word about him this time; I haven't asked you how Miss Post's eyes are, and what Dr. Ellis says about them. I have been afraid for sometime that there was something pretty serious the matter with them."

"There is," said Muriel, sadly. "He says it is cataract, and that it will be some months yet, before he can perform

any operation, even should he think it best to do so eventually, and meanwhile, her sight will be growing dimmer all the time, until she becomes quite blind."

"I thought they could always operate for cataract," said Aunt Sally, "Did he give any reason for being doubtful about it."

"Yes, and that was the worst of all! He said Miss Post was in such a reduced condition, physically, that it might not be safe to risk the shock; that she has evidently overworked herself, and not eaten enough nourishing food for months past. I was puzzled at first about the overworking, for she had told me that she never got sewing enough of late to keep her busy all the time, and then it suddenly occurred to me that she had, of course, done her own washing and ironing, and carried up coal and water, and to a woman as fragile as she seems to be, that must have been dreadfully hard work. And I really don't suppose she has eaten meat more than once a week, for months, except when Miss Forsythe would ask her to tea, or she went out to work. And lately, I know, most of her work has been given her to take home. I asked Dr Ellis if it would increase her chance if she would take plenty of nourishing things in the interval, and save herself in every way, and he said, of course it would, that if she would do that, he felt pretty confident of being able to do it, so that is a great comfort. And, Aunt Sally, I wanted to ask you, do you know of any nice little girl, twelve or thirteen years old, to whom it would be an advantage to have an easy place? I want one just to wait on Miss Post, and she could learn to sew, and do some of the nicer house work, so that, when I don't need her any longer, or if I don't, I could easily find a place for her."

"Yes, I think I do; there's a very respectable Scotch family living in the alley just back of this house; they have a lame son, a fine young fellow, in whom we are all inter-

ested, and, poor as they are, they took an orphan child—a niece of the woman's—the other day, because she was left without a home. I've seen her several times, and I like the look of her. She's a clean, tidy, low-speaking, little body, without any ugly tricks, so far as I've seen, and I think they would be very glad to have her in such a place as that would be. I often feel ashamed when I see how the downright poor people help each other and seem to think its only natural and right. I don't suppose it crossed the mind of these people of whom I speak that they might send the child to the poor-house ; they just took her, as a matter of course."

"I know," said Muriel ; "Margery has told me a great many such things—things that make me wonder how any body can say that we are retrograding. If it would not be giving you too much trouble I should like you to speak first to these people about the little girl for me, and then, if they seem to favor the plan, I will come and have a talk with them about it."

"It won't be any trouble at all, my dear. I always like to go there ; they have such nice Scotch voices. I'll let you know as soon as I can what they say, though I have very little doubt what their answer will be. And it's a very good idea, having somebody just on purpose to wait on Miss Post ; it will keep the servants from thinking they're imposed upon, and make her easy in her mind besides, for she'll want a good deal of looking after as she grows more blind. What a mercy it is that you found her just when you did, though I've faith to believe that if you hadn't, somebody else would have done it. Still, it mightn't have been any body who was as able as you are to do it right."

The thing that pleased Muriel most, in recalling this conversation, was the manner in which Aunt Sally had spoken of what she—Muriel—was doing for Miss Post. There had

been no surprise, no flattering comment, but just a quiet taking for granted that it was the natural and proper thing to do.

"I wonder why we couldn't all have been born sensible?" she mused; "it would have saved such a vast deal of trouble and work."

But, following out the thought, she came to the conclusion that common-sense, like a foreign language, might be so thoroughly acquired as almost to seem native, and she further decided that nobody had so much as to be able to afford to give up cultivating it.

It occurred to her, as Aunt Sally paused, after the above remarks, that she could not possibly find a better moment to urge her plea.

"Aunt Sally," she began, abruptly, "I have a favor, a very great favor, to ask of you, and I want you to please to listen to me patiently a few minutes, while I explain first. Will you?"

"To be sure I will, dear, and you may be certain it will be granted, if it's any thing at all reasonable and right, and I don't think you would ask for what wasn't both."

"Thank you. I am glad you think that. I don't know whether I have spoken to you about this before or not, but my aunts and uncles, when I was first left alone, seemed to think that I would leave the house at once, and either board, or make visits among my relatives. I did not see any reason for doing so, and I had a very strong reason for staying where I was. Grandpapa said several things to me during the last few weeks of his life which made me know that he wished me to do good with his money after it became mine. And he left the way of doing it entirely to me. It seemed to me that I could do a great deal more and find a great many more opportunities if I staid where I was, and I think so still. So then, when they found I did

not wish to close the house, they said I ought to have a companion. I had already thought so myself, only I don't think we meant exactly the same thing. I dared not advertise, and then choose some one hastily and on a slight acquaintance, for I thought how very unpleasant it would be for both of us if I should wish to send her away, and I did not want a 'companion' in the common acceptation of the word. I wanted somebody older and wiser than myself, who would be able to advise me when my want of experience troubled me, and yet some one who would be a real friend whom I could love and trust. And it seemed as if I could not possibly find the right person until I heard about you. May thought of you before I met you, and encouraged me to ask you; I should never have dared to do it but for her, and I feel very impertinent now, for it is asking such a great thing, and I know your 'children' will not think it possible to do without you. But there are three of them; Miss Raymond has had you long enough to know all your ways, and in a measure to take your place to the other two and—I want you."

Aunt Sally had listened with praiseworthy silence and patience to this long speech, and when it was finished she seemed, for once in her life, at a loss for a reply.

"My dear," she said, at last, "you've taken my breath away, even more than my 'children' did when they asked me to come and live with them a few years ago. And whatever I may find it right to do in the matter, I shall always thank you for wanting me. I can't give you an answer off-hand. It's a matter to be thought over and prayed over; but I'm free to confess that I see quite as many *pros* as *cons*. And that's the reason why I must not decide in a hurry. It would give me a chance, I foresee, to carry out so many of my notions and to do so many things that I've wanted for years to do, that I can't trust

my own judgment about it. I could leave the children now, though it would be a good deal of a heartbreak to do it, I'll admit, and after the first fuss was over, they would not try to stand in my way if they saw that I really thought it right to go. Alice is a very good housekeeper and manager, and giving music-lessons is not like school-teaching; she has odd hours of leisure through the day, when she could see to things, and I've let her do more about the house than I ever let Rose or Marion do, for—several reasons. But I'll not bother you with all my arguments for and against. I will think the matter over very carefully, and ask the opinion of one or two people whose opinion is worth asking. And I will give you my answer not later than a week from to-day. Will that do?"

"Indeed it will!" said Muriel, joyfully, "I was so afraid you would refuse outright, and at once, that I consider that a very good answer indeed. And Aunt Sally, you must let me finish the business-part of the talk now, and then all will be clear and straightforward. When they first talked to me about having a 'companion,' I made inquiries about the salary which was usually given, and found it ranged from three to five hundred dollars. It seemed to me that was very little, and five hundred, at least, you must take, if you consent to come. I'll not try to say how much more your presence will be worth to me, for it is not a thing that can be measured against money!"

"Now, I dare say," said Aunt Sally, meditatively, "that if I was some folks, I should fly out about your offering me a salary, and say that if I lived with you at all, it would be simply as a friend. But, from your side of the question, you're right, and as for my side, I must consider that along with the rest. The children have never given me money, but they're constantly giving me money's worth. Between Christmas and birthdays, they've contrived it so that I've

never had to buy any clothes since I came to them. If I lived with you and stopped doing housework—and I'll admit that I don't find it quite so easy as I did five years ago, for all my lameness is so nearly cured—I should wish to dress a little better than I have done, for your sake, and that would make it fair, I suppose, that you should give me enough to buy me decent clothes; but it seems to me that five hundred is a great deal too much. However, we'll not try to settle any thing to-night. You've said your say, and said it like the good, sensible girl that I think you are, and as for my answer, I don't doubt I shall be guided right about it, if I lay myself open to guidance, as I hope to do. There, it's striking six, and I must begin to get supper. Would you rather stay here and read some of that pile of trash on the table, or come with me, and may be help me a little?"

"Now just as if you didn't know I would rather come with you!" said Muriel, springing up.

"What a delightful little kitchen!" she added, as Aunt Sally opened the door into it, and proceeded to light the kerosene stove.

"Yes, it's pretty good, what there is of it!" replied Aunt Sally, looking round with a satisfied expression—as well she might. Every thing shone that could be made to shine. Every thing that would make cooking easy to do was there, in the smallest possible compass, and the kerosene stove, even to a novice, suggested wonderful capabilities. Muriel looked on with undisguised admiration, while Aunt Sally proceeded to stew in milk the boiled potatoes which were waiting for her, and then, when she had them simmering to her mind on one division of the stove, to broil the chops which she took from the lower compartment of her provision safe, and which, under her skillful management, and inclosed in the double broiler, cooked tranquilly, without

sputtering or smoke, while the kettle "came to a boil" on the third division of the stove.

"We don't usually have suppers so much like dinners," she explained, as her practiced hands went nimbly from one thing to another, "but Alice was away to-day, and Marion said that if I would put her up a lunch, she could meet Dick a little sooner for their walk than she could if they came home to dinner, so I helped Dick eat up some cold meat at noon, and kept the chops and potatoes for tea, and I'm right glad now that I did, for I suppose you're like every body else, now, and have your dinner when you used to have your tea."

"I haven't quite made up my mind yet," said Muriel, "I am trying a late dinner because it leaves a better shaped day, but I find that after dining about one or two o'clock all my life I miss my dinner at lunch time, and am not very anxious for it in the evening. I mean to try a little while longer, and then, if I don't grow used to the new way, I shall go back to the old one, and be comfortably old-fashioned. But I thought you were going to let me help you, Aunt Sally"

"Well, so I am, and I am glad to hear you talk so sensibly. I suppose, if folks have never had it any other way, they may like a late dinner best, but nobody can make me believe that it's best for them! Here, if you'll put this apron on, and turn back your cuffs, you may slice these tomatoes into this little dish for me; here's a nice sharp knife; take care you don't cut your fingers, child!"

"What nice tomatoes! The only ones I've seen in the stores this spring have been such poor little things, and these are almost the largest I ever saw!"

"You don't suppose I *bought* those tomatoes at this time of year!" said Aunt Sally, indignantly. "No, indeed! I put up two dozen jars of whole ones last summer at Dove-

dale, just on purpose for slicing and frying, and those that are left are every one as sound as a dollar here in April! Now wash your hands; here's the basin, and then you may cut the bread, if you'll cut it thin, and I wonder if you could set the table?"

"I think I could," said Muriel, smiling, and Aunt Sally proceeded to tell her where to find tablecloth and dishes, while she herself took down coffee-mill and coffee-pot, announcing:

"I think I'll treat you all to a little coffee this evening. Dick says its the surest sign of a festivity, when he smells coffee on our landing, and as this will be the first time you've broken bread with us, I'll smother my convictions again. I suppose you drink coffee? Every body does now—even the people who say they can't."

"I do sometimes," said Muriel, coming to the door as she spoke. "Grandmamma never would let me have it, or tea either, because she said it would 'ruin my complexion,' and we weren't allowed it at school, but I used to take it sometimes after I came home to stay, and I am like Dick, the very smell of it suggests festivity to me, though I am sure I don't know why. But don't trouble to make it just because I'm here, Aunt Sally. I do not drink it regularly, and shall not miss it at all."

"It is no trouble, child. I like it as well as any body does, and I believe I'm always glad of an excuse to make it, but I'm glad you weren't allowed it while you were growing and studying. I've seen children that weren't much more than babies allowed to drink it, and it was made nearly as strong as it was for their fathers and mothers, too, and I'm entirely convinced that the world would be a good deal better off if it had never been discovered, or tea either."

Voices and steps on the stairway cut short Aunt Sally's disquisition, and presently Marion and Dick appeared arm-

in-arm, and flushed with exercise and health. They seemed so genuinely pleased to find Muriel there, and to learn that she was going to stay to tea, that her conscience smote her. What would they say when they learned what her errand had been? However, to her great relief, she soon found that Aunt Sally had no intention of mentioning it in her presence, so she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour, trying not to think of the lonely breakfast which would seem all the lonelier by contrast with this cheerful meal. Marion and Dick were full of the delights and discoveries of their walk, and had brought home sundry bare-looking twigs, which they were quite confident would "come out," if they were put in warmish water and set in the sun every day.

"I shall fill my pockets with onion-sets and radish-seed, and abscond to Dovedale, if we have a few more days of this weather," said Dick. "How any body in his senses can deliberately elect to live in a city, when he might live in the country, is one of the standing puzzles of my life."

"You needn't worry about the weather," said Aunt Sally. "If you had rheumatism in your knee, you'd be very sure that we're not going to have more than one more clear day this trip! But I've been thinking, myself, that it wouldn't be a bad plan for you to go there for a few days in your Easter holidays, and make sure that Joe is planting every thing we shall want in the garden."

"Aunt Sally, you are an angel!" said Dick, enthusiastically, "I have been cherishing that very thought for days, without daring to announce it. You shall have an extra row of okras planted, for that. You know you said the other day that you could have used twice as many this winter, if you'd had them."

"It must be very entertaining to have a garden," said Muriel. "I always wanted one, but never had it, and I've been thinking quite seriously this spring of stealing a little

piece off the 'lawn,' as Rogers persists in calling the grass-plot, quite at the back, where it would be inconspicuous from the street, and having a little kitchen garden. Is it too late to plant radishes, and—and—onions, and tomato-vines, Dick?"

"No, indeed!" replied Dick, with eager interest. "And I'll tell you what, Miss Muriel, if you'll let me come and mark off that piece of ground, and dig it up, and plant the first things in it next Saturday, you'll be doing an act of Christain charity."

Aunt Sally did not exactly wink at Muriel, but she "made a face," and Muriel understood it.

"Will you, really?" she said, "and let me plant some of the things, and show me how to hoe and rake? You're sure you can spare the time?"

"Quite sure!" said Dick, emphatically; "and, Miss Muriel, it's too soon yet to plant any thing but the onion-sets and radishes, and some spinach and lettuce, and a few things like that, but when I go to Dovedale in the Easter holidays, I'll bring you some prime tomato-plants—better than any you can get here, and set them out for you so that they'll be sure to grow. Joe and I planted the hot-bed when I was there in the Christmas holidays, and it's flourishing, he writes me."

"I think you are very kind indeed," said Muriel, gratefully, "and you don't know how I shall enjoy having a garden! I mean to have more flower-beds laid out this spring, too. I want to raise flowers and roots to give away."

"That's a good idea," said Aunt Sally, approvingly, "it goes to my heart to see how people who can't get flowers seem to crave them. The children sent a good many boxes of wild-flowers from Dovedale last summer, and the summer before, too, and we were fortunate enough to have them distributed in places which even the flower-mission doesn't often reach."

"How did you manage?" asked Muriel, with quick and genuine interest.

"We have a friend," replied Aunt Sally, "a sort of self-appointed city missionary, and he used to take the flowers in his hand, a great bunch at a time, and walk through some of the worst alleys in Boston, and when the poor little, dirty, ragged children swarmed round himwith, 'Give me a flower, please; give me a flower!" he just gave them; and before the first summer was over he knew a good many of the children by sight, and by name, too, and they knew him; and after awhile he'd stop and have a little talk with them, and so he sort of worked it on gradually from one thing to another, till he found decent homes for some of them, and places for others to work in, and gave a good many of them the first idea they'd ever had of Christ and His religion. I don't think any body in this world will ever know the good that young man has done, and is doing, in quiet ways that aren't often thought of."

"Is he a minister?" Muriel inquired.

"No, he's not, in the usual sense of the word," said Aunt Sally; "he's a clerk in a wholesale drygoods store, with a salary of eight hundred dollars a year!"

"A bookkeeper, aunty," said Marion, quickly.

"Well, child, where's the difference? At any rate, I've a notion that he gives away about half of his salary, and though he always looks as neat as wax, and nobody'd mistake him for any thing but a gentleman, you can see that he doesn't get new clothes every time the fashion changes."

"What is his name?" asked Muriel.

"Neil Duncan. One's an Irish name and the other a Scotch one, and I've often thought the Irish couldn't be so very far back, he takes life so easily, and has such a keen sense of fun. I think that is one secret of his success among the children. He's a good deal of a child himself

in some ways, although he can't be less than thirty years old, I should think, in reality."

"I think it is beautiful about the flowers," said Muriel; "I am so glad he thought of it. Does any one send them to him in winter, I wonder?"

"Not that I know of. That's one fault I have to find with him; it's about the only one; he never will ask for any thing, and there are plenty of people who would be glad of the chance to give through his agency, if he'd only let them know; but I believe he'd take the coat off his back before he'd ask any body for help."

"I think that is a great pity," said Muriel, thoughtfully, "both on his own account and on that of the people he deprives of help. Will you please give me his address, Aunt Sally? If I ever carry out my scheme about the temperance saloons, he would be the very person to tell me of the best places for them, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I think he would. I'll write you the address after tea, dear; if you're like most people you'll not remember it long enough to write it down yourself. He lives in lodgings, and professes to get his meals at a restaurant, but he was trying to convince me the other day, that oatmeal contained every thing that is requisite for the nourishment of the body, and that people, as a general thing, eat a great deal too much meat. I don't believe he does."

"Why, Aunt Sally, he's the picture of health and strength," said Marion. "I'm sure he looks as if he had plenty to eat, and if it is oatmeal, his theories must be correct."

"Well my dear, I didn't say any thing to the contrary, did I? I don't think he'd be foolish enough to carry his self-denial to the point of incapacitating him for work. Come, if you've all finished, we may as well clear the table. Somehow whenever we're later than usual with tea, some-

body feels called upon to come and spend the evening with us. It's after eight, though, so perhaps to-night will be the exception."

Aunt Sally and Marion retired to the kitchen with the tea things, and in the half hour of their absence Muriel made rapid progress in her acquaintance with Dick, whom she liked more and more as his frank talk revealed his character. He was not exceptionally bright, intellectually, but his sturdy honesty and evident good temper, quite made up, in Muriel's estimation, for that. He told her a great deal about Dovedale, and she could see that had he consulted only his own wishes, he would have fixed a much earlier time for assuming charge of the farm than that for which he had agreed to wait.

She rose to go soon after nine o'clock, for she knew Margery would be disturbed by her unwonted absence, and when she mentioned this, Aunt Sally did not urge her to stay. Dick was standing, hat in hand, waiting for the good-byes to be finished, when Alice returned, escorted by her brother-in-law, who had come up stairs, he asserted, merely for the pleasure of kissing Aunt Sally good-night.

"But Rose said something, aunty" he added, "about a jar of pickles you had for me—I didn't quite understand——"

"I said I had a jar of pickles *for her*, young man," said Aunt Sally, briskly, "but you may as well take it, as long as you're here."

"It's all the same," said Mr. Osborne, "and I hope Miss Douglas isn't too proud to walk with a pickle-jar—you'll let me take you home, Miss Douglas? And if you are too proud, I will trust Aunt Sally with it till to-morrow."

"I am not at all too proud, thank you," said Muriel, laughing, "but Mr. Raymond is going to take me home, so

I will not trouble you with the double charge. I should never forgive myself if you were to drop the pickles."

Dick looked very much pleased. He had had a gloomy foreboding, when his brother-in-law appeared upon the scene, that his services would be dispensed with, for although he still considered himself a boy, there were times and seasons when he did not find it altogether pleasing to be treated "as such," notwithstanding his declaration to Marion.

"So you prefer to drop me?" suggested Mr. Osborne, "but if you are sincere, you will not forbid me to walk with you and Dick so far as our roads are the same, and if you are not, you will be justly punished. Here comes Aunt Sally with my jar of pickles—it is bigger than my fondest dream of it, and walnuts, I do believe."

Dick was a little disappointed when he found they were going to take a car instead of walking all the way, but Muriel, having measured the distance that afternoon, and found it rather greater than she had thought, was unwilling to lengthen her absence needlessly, and she thought, besides, that by the time Dick reached home he would have had quite enough exercise for one day. They parted with very friendly feelings toward each other, and a renewal of the engagement about the "kitchen garden," and Muriel's face was so unwontedly bright, when Margery met her in the hall, that that worthy woman relented a little—but only a little.

"Well, Miss Muriel," she said, sternly, "I've had a fine fright about you this evening, and the dinner keeping warm till after eight o'clock. It would not have made your pleasuring any the less, may be, if you'd told me you'd be away for dinner——"

"But I did not know that I should, Margery, dear," said Muriel, meekly. "I went to see Miss Bowne, and she kept

me to tea, and I've had such a happy evening that you mustn't scold me. I did mean to tell you where I was going, for I thought I might possibly stay to tea, but I forgot it just at the last. Has any one been here?"

"Your three great-aunts, the Misses Gordon, called very soon after you went out," replied Margery, and Muriel saw, or fancied she saw, a sort of twinkle in the old woman's eyes. "They seemed much put about at not finding you at home, and I was quite unable to say where you had gone, which was a pity, perhaps. But Miss Jessie bade me tell you that she hoped, since you were visiting, you would not be long before you came to see them."

"I shall go very soon," said Muriel, "I'm sorry you were frightened, Margery."

"I'll get over it, may be," answered Margery, with a perceptible softening of voice and manner. "Good-night, Miss Muriel.

CHAPTER VII.

A PEACEFUL VICTORY.

"There is a pleasure that is born of pain."
—"*Owen Meredith.*"

THERE was one lesson which Miss Bowne had learned thoroughly, and that was that the time and manner of making a suggestion had much to do with it's prosperity; and as, the more she thought of it, the more she leaned to an acceptance of Muriel's invitation, she waited patiently for a fitting opportunity to lay the matter before her children. She was greatly tempted to speak of it that first evening as soon as Muriel was gone, but she stoutly resisted the temptation. Alice was never a very sound sleeper, and her aunt knew that a discussion, such as would inevitably follow the announcement, would cost her several hours of needed sleep. Besides, Aunt Sally had found the wisdom of "sleeping on" important questions before discussing them, and she decided that, should she think it best to refuse Muriel, it would also be best to say nothing to any one about the matter. So she said little beside good-night, after Muriel went, and Marion, fearing that she was tired, did not try to make her talk. They had all been concerned to notice of late, that she seemed less vigorous and strong than she had been, and there was a general conspiracy to save her in every possible way, which by no means escaped her notice, although she did not speak of it, or of the failure of her strength. The truth was, that city

life, and confinement to the small quarters which she and her family occupied, was telling upon her, and she was dimly conscious of this, but quite unwilling to acknowledge it even to herself. But she caught herself, from time to time, looking forward with all Dick's eagerness to the time when he should be permanently established at Dovedale, and she could once more live the free and simple life which was most natural to her. These two comrades had many refreshing talks about "the good time coming," and their kitchen-garden, and truck-patch, and "critters" as Joe invariably called the live-stock, and Dick had a profound respect and admiration for Aunt Sally, on the strength of her experience as a farmer, quite apart from all other considerations. Summer was their gala-time, and Aunt Sally tided the restless boy over many a discontented hour, by drawing him into talks about the farm. A doubt on her mind about leaving Dick was, when she came to think the matter over quietly, the chief obstacle between herself and the acceptance of Muriel's proposition. The more she thought of this latter, the more the horizon seemed to widen. With her knowledge and experience, added to Muriel's will and financial ability, and young strength and health, how much they might accomplish! And she was honestly afraid that Muriel would waste both time and money in many blunders if she were left to herself, or still worse, fell into hands of injudicious advisers. She did not feel that it would be wrong to leave Alice and Marion now, for although the latter had still nearly a year of teaching before her, as a fixed engagement, in payment for her "finishing" at Mrs. Irving's school, the one session a day left her enough time to enable her to do her full share of the housework, which, under skillful and intelligent management, had been reduced to a minimum. And a little more self-denial would not hurt Alice. She was struggling

bravely with her besetting sin of selfishness, and her family noticed a very marked change for the better in her since her return from her uncle's, about two years ago, but Aunt Sally often saw with pain the hold old habits had upon her; how she humored herself almost unconsciously in many small ways, at the expense of the others, and often let Marion take an undue share of the errand-going, which was the chief part of the house-work permitted them. Marion's frank and generous nature made her quite unsuspicious of this, and was, Aunt Sally sometimes thought, a real disadvantage to Alice. Perhaps, under the new arrangement, a change for the better might take place.

"And it wouldn't be like going off somewhere where I couldn't get to them, nor they to me," she argued with herself. "Muriel likes them all already; I can see that; and it would be no cross to her to have them coming about the house, as they certainly would come, if she had me there. And a friendship with a girl such as she is, might do quite as much for Dick, just now, as my being with him could. It did me good to see them talking together, just as if they were both boys or both girls. The fact is, Sarah Bowne, you want to have a long finger in that dear girl's pie, and you're trimming off your arguments to fit your wishes! I must leave it to somebody who isn't biased either way, and yet knows all the circumstances. I've never thought I was very intimately acquainted with Mr. Hamilton, but we've always been friendly on fair principles, and he'd be the first of his kind, if he wasn't willing to give advice! I shall just go quietly to his counting-room to-morrow afternoon, and lay the whole case before him and ask him what he thinks I'd better do, and if I see that he really gives his mind to it, and don't just say the first thing that comes handiest, to get rid of me, I'll do whichever he says—for I've no opinion of folks that ask for advice they don't mean to follow!"

If Mr. Hamilton was surprised, the following afternoon, when Miss Bowne appeared at the door of his counting-room, he kept his surprise to himself in an able manner, and seated her in the most comfortable chair he possessed, with an old-fashioned courtesy which highly gratified her. He had a very sincere respect for the old lady, and if they could but have discovered it, much in common with her, which would have made a friendship between them very pleasant for both, but as he grew year by year more and more absorbed in business-cares and anxieties, he ceased even to keep up communication with old friends, and never thought of forming new friendships.

Aunt Sally had a great contempt for "fooling," and she had also that somewhat rare quality, an appreciation of the value of other people's time, so she came to the point speedily with—

"Are you too busy Mr. Hamilton to spare me fifteen minutes? I'd greatly prefer that you should say so at once, if you are!"

"I am not," he said, with a very pleasant smile; "my business is over for to-day, and I was just making ready to go up town. I tell you this not to hurry you, but quite the reverse. It is now half-past four; we do not dine until seven, and it takes me just half an hour to make the journey. In what way can I serve you?"

"I would like you to advise me about something that I can't settle for myself," replied Aunt Sally; and without further preface or apology she stated her case with perfect impartiality and in the fewest possible words.

Mr. Hamilton listened attentively, and with evident interest. He was silent for some little time after she had finished, and then he said, deliberately:

"I do not know, and I suppose you prefer that I should not know until I have given you my opinion, what your

own inclination is in this matter, but it seems to me that if you wish to accept Miss Douglas's offer, you need have no scruple about leaving your nieces and nephew. I have observed Dick closely for some time past, and I think he can be trusted with himself. He is unusually conscientious for a boy of his age and sincerely fond of his sisters. As for the girls, it will do Marion no harm, I think, and may do Alice much good to have the added responsibility which will come to them with your departure. And I can see that you might make yourself very widely useful by living with Miss Douglas. Fanny has told me a good deal about her, and all she tells me impresses me favorably; but it is a heavy responsibility which has been suddenly thrust upon her, and much depends upon the beginning she makes. So, judging, as I only can, from my limited knowledge of the circumstances, I should advise you to accept Miss Douglas's offer."

"But don't you think?" inquired Aunt Sally, "that five hundred dollars a year is a great deal too much for her to pay me, in addition to my board and lodging, just for living with her? It isn't as if I could do any sort of work, you see."

"No, I do not think it is," replied Mr. Hamilton, without taking any time for deliberation now. "Your judgment and experience will probably be worth quite that much to her in various ways, and you will find, I imagine, numerous small expenditures necessary which are not necessary now. I think you need have no hesitation in accepting the sum named by Miss Douglas. It is not large enough to place you under any obligation, and yet I consider that it is perfectly fair."

Aunt Sally rose as he finished speaking, and held out her hand, saying:

"You've done me more of a favor than you know, per-

haps, Mr. Hamilton, and I shall not forget it. Whether or not you've done Miss Douglas one remains to be seen."

He shook hands with her cordially, as he said:

"I am quite at ease upon that head. And you have done me a favor, Miss Bowne. You have taken for granted more than most people would believe of me upon sworn testimony."

Aunt Sally's mind was the battle-ground of conflicting feelings as she marched home. Mr. Hamilton's advice was so evidently well considered and sincere that she felt pledged to herself to be guided by it; yet, now that she might consider her decision made, it seemed to her that she had been hasty, and that fresh reasons for reversing it sprang up at every corner she turned. She wished, too, now, that she had mentioned the proposal to her children that evening and allowed them to have some voice in her decision, instead of waiting to settle the matter before speaking of it at all.

"I've three-quarters of a mind just to end the whole business by telling her I can't go, and there's no more to be said," she thought, as she drew nearer home. "I don't see how those girls will manage, with their teaching, to pay half enough attention to the housekeeping. They'll spend twice what they spend now and not have as much to show for it. And if the table is poor, it'll be Dick who will suffer the most, for he's a growing boy and needs good wholesome food, and plenty of it. I wish I hadn't gone to Mr. Hamilton."

Then, with a sudden effort of will:

"Sarah Bowne, you're a weak-minded old goose. Whichever way you settled it you'd be hankering after the other. And I'll not have you breaking a promise, if it is only to yourself. You've made your decision; now do you abide by it, and make the best of it."

And she refused to discuss the matter any further with herself, resolutely turning her attention to the shop windows, which usually kept her sufficiently amused when she took her walks abroad, but which somehow failed to interest her to-day.

We need not wonder that we make such slow progress in a real acquaintanceship with other people when we consider how slightly we are acquainted with our real selves. Aunt Sally was perfectly certain, before the momentous interview with her children took place, that their distress at losing her would be the thorn in her flesh which would make her decision, if not exactly meritorious, entirely free from the charge of self-indulgence, and that it would at least equal her sorrow for even so slight and partial a separation as that before them. But, although, when she first mentioned Muriel's proposal, the demonstration fully equaled her expectations, she had not employed more than half her arguments when she saw that her auditors were beginning to look upon the scheme, if not exactly with favor, at least without hostility. What she did not see was, that the same idea had occurred to them all—the solid advantages for herself which would be gained. As has been said, they had all observed with anxiety the recent failure in her strength, and in talking it over together had attributed it to the right cause, and deplored their inability to do any thing before the close of the school year should leave them free to return to Dovedale. It distressed them to see her gallantly persevering, in spite of weariness and discomfort, in work which, with a little management, they could have done themselves, but, after several encounters, in which they invariably got the worst of it, they were obliged to give up their affectionate attempts to lighten her labors, for they saw that the idea of being a useless burden upon their hands, or those of any one else, was far worse for her

even, than over-fatigue. A carefully-worded suggestion that a little girl in the neighborhood should be permitted to come for a few hours every morning and "do up the work," under Aunt Sally's supervision, had been met with undisguised scorn; and it was just because all their attempts to make her more comfortable had met with such utter failure that, after the first shock was over, they were ready to listen reasonably to what she had to say.

"We stole you from cousin Marion and cousin Philip, in exactly the same way, dear," said Marion, when she had finished, "and so, desolate as we shall be without you, we have no right to detain you by force! The mills of the gods seem to have ground rather rapidly though, in this particular case."

"It would be almost like going into the country, wouldn't it?" said Alice; "the house is so large, and has such nice grounds about it, and it is so much further out than this house is."

"It couldn't well be further in, ma'am," said Dick, "but that's neither here nor there; the chief shock to me is Miss Muriel's perfidy. It seems that, while we were on hospitable thoughts intent, she was planning ruin and disaster for us, and with such an innocent face, too! But, indeed, Aunt Sally, we should be selfish wretches if we were to lay a detaining finger on you, when you've such an offer as that —a young woman who has more money than she knows what to do with, actually begging you to 'boss' the spending of it! Virtue is rewarded, once in awhile, even in this wicked world!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense, Dick!" said Aunt Sally, with an unusual sharpness in her tones. "You know well enough that I wouldn't stir a step from here, for her or any body else, just for my own comfort. But it seems like an opportunity that I've been sort of waiting for,

without knowing it, nearly all my life, and you needn't think, any of you, that I'm just going blindfold on my own judgment, for I'm not! I was so torn to pieces trying to settle it, that I made up my mind I'd better go to somebody who could see it from the outside, and all round, and I did go yesterday afternoon to your Uncle Hamilton. He couldn't have been kinder about it if he'd been my own brother, and he was a good deal more sensible, I make no doubt. I could see he really thought the matter over before he spoke, and when he did speak, he advised me by all means to go. I had come to one conclusion, and that was, if I saw he cared enough to consider the matter at all, I'd be guided by what he said, so you see!"

"Why aunty!" said Alice, laughing a little, "what in the world put it into your head to go to Uncle Hamilton? Weren't you afraid?"

"No, I wasn't afraid. Why should I be? And I went to him because I had reason to think that he had a clear head, and never spoke before he knew what he was going to say. And I wasn't disappointed in him. But as soon as he'd given me his opinion, I began to see forty arguments on the other side of the question where I'd seen one before, and I almost wished I hadn't asked him."

"I am glad you did," said Marion. "We have all been worried about you lately—you work so hard, and you're so *fierce* if we try to help you, or keep you from doing any thing; and at Muriel's, no matter how much you occupy yourself with good deeds, they will not use you up physically as general housework is doing. But we can't let you go sit in the lap of luxury until you've given us a few lessons, and let us into your secrets about bones and scraps, and such!"

"I declare," said Aunt Sally, half crying and more than half angry, "you're all alike! You all seem to think that

I'm leaving you because I'm overworked, and because I think I can 'better myself,' when dear knows you ought to know me too well by this time to believe any thing like that of me! I'll never be as happy again any where, I don't care where it is, as I've been with all of you, and I think you might have better sense!"

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke, and this was so unusual, almost unprecedented, that it made a sensation. They all saw, or fancied they saw, that she thought they were letting her go very easily, and the fresh demonstration which followed, although it was balm to her wounded spirit, came very near upsetting her determination. But the matter was settled at last; they succeeded in convincing her that they really wished her to go, and yet that they should miss her just as much as if they did not, and that they could manage the "flat-work," between them, without calling in outside help, and without ruinous waste and destruction. This desirable state of affairs had just been reached, when the arrival of Rose and Jack necessitated a repetition of the facts of the case, and Jack came near upsetting the treacherous calm with his indignant strictures, three parts earnest and one part fun, upon Aunt Sally, for being so faithless as to desert her family for a comparative stranger. Rose's gentle tact reduced Jack to order and comforted Aunt Sally, but Jack broke out, at short intervals, all through the evening, saying that it was all very well for the others, with their shallow natures and love of change, to resign themselves so readily to what they were pleased to consider the inevitable, and for Aunt Sally to let a marble hall and a gilded orphan lure her away from her own family, in this light and easy manner, but that to a person of a dark and true and tender nature, such as his was, such shocks were too great to be calmly borne.

"Will she allow you to receive visitors, Miss Bowne?"

he asked, after an interval of silence and gloomy contemplation, adding, as Aunt Sally looked fiercely at him :

"I don't suppose it will be proper for us to call you Aunt Sally, under the fresh set of circumstances which you are preparing for us, and I must begin at once to practice on the other form of address, or I shall be mortifying you before your aristocratic connections—if you *are* permitted to invite your 'umble friends to the abode of wealth ! "

" You're not worth answering when you talk such dreadful nonsense as that," said Aunt Sally, severely ; " you know, as well as you know you're alive, that I'd never go anywhere, or do any thing, that would cut me off from my own folks, and it isn't becoming to insinuate, even in joke, that I would. I did hope," she added, turning to Rose, " that after he married you, and settled down, he'd come into what sense he was meant to have, but I don't see that he's done it yet."

" Give him a little more time, aunty," said Rose, laughing. " Just think how many years he ran wild before I took him in hand. And he really isn't quite so bad as he was. I see enough improvement to encourage me to keep on."

Jack made one of his worst faces, but no other reply, and when they said good-night, he took Aunt Sally in his arms, and held her fast, saying :

" Did you really think I should be glad to have you take your candlestick out of this place, where you've given me so many happy hours, and where thanks to your wisdom, my Rose of all the world——"

But here, to the utter consternation of himself and all the rest of the family, Aunt Sally dropped her head on his shoulder, and began to cry. They all came about her, hugging, kissing, calling her pet names, begging her pardon, entreating her not to cry any more, until she raised her head,

smiling, though in an uncertain fashion, and assured them that she was not going to have hysterics.

"The fact is," she said, with a poor imitation of her most business-like manner, "I've been worrying and haggling with myself over this affair till I'm all upset, and now I'm not going to say another word about it, to-night or to-morrow either, and after that, perhaps, I can talk of it without making a public fool of myself about it, as I've done to-night.

A chorus of "You haven't!" seemed measurably to console her, but she said good-night almost as soon as Rose and Jack were gone, and when Alice and Marion, an hour afterward went to the large room, divided by a curtain, which they shared with her, the curtain was drawn and all was still.

Marion took special pains to secure an audience with Mrs. Craig and explain matters to her, before she and Aunt Sally met, and so save the latter all needless distress. But Mrs. Craig, instead of "holding up her hands in amazement," as all the others had done, at once accepted the situation with the cheerful philosophy which was one of her prominent characteristics.

"I think it's an excellent arrangement," she said, when Marion had fully explained it to her. "Aunt Sally is working harder than a woman of her age ought to work, and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't stop her so long as she remains with you. And just the change, even if it were not a change for the better, would do her good. I don't see myself how people stand it to stay in the same place and at the same things forever, as so many of them do, and I've been trying for a week to coax Stephen to go on a little spree with me, just to New York or to Philadelphia, by one of those nice little steamers, or something like that, but he's the most inexorable man! He says if I want him

to take a real holiday in the summer, he must work on steadily during the interval, but that I can go by myself, if I wish to. He knows he's quite safe in saying that, or he wouldn't say it. So last evening, when he thought he was going to read all the instructive and didactic articles in the *Nation* to me while I darned his socks, I made him help me move every single thing in this parlor into a different place, and this morning, when I dusted, I found it quite refreshing. I'd advise you to try it."

"I thought it looked as if there had been an earthquake here," said Marion, "but I couldn't tell what the matter was. You don't think there's any thing seriously amiss with Aunt Sally, do you, Fanny?"

"No indeed; I think the easy life, comparatively speaking, which she will lead with Muriel, and the freedom from housekeeping cares, will bring her all right again in a very short time. But she isn't so young as she was a few years ago, you must remember, and she tires more easily."

Fanny's husband quite agreed with her in her view of the case when they talked the matter over, and their cordial approval and encouragement when they next met Aunt Sally, had a most soothing and reassuring effect upon her.

Rose must have talked very seriously indeed to Jack, after the evening upon which he first learned Aunt Sally's intention to leave her children, for he disturbed her by no more teasing on the subject. But he was genuinely sorry that she felt called upon to make the change, and doubted very much the wisdom of it and its duration.

"You mustn't be too proud to come back to your deserted nest, if you find the other one doesn't fit, Aunt Sally," he said to her when they next talked of the matter, and she assured him very earnestly that she would not.

"But it'll be my own fault, I reckon, if it don't fit," she

added, and Jack forebore to make any suggestions or to prophesy dark things.

Muriel, meanwhile, had waited as patiently as she could for her answer, sending a slightly triumphant note to May with the news that at least she had not been refused. And May was quite willing to admit that this looked very much like victory, and to rejoice with Muriel over the failure of her own prophecy, when Aunt Sally made her decision known.

"But I can't come to you for three or four weeks, my dear," the latter wrote to Muriel, "for I must make sure first that my girls here can manage the housekeeping without me, and I may as well say right out, that if I find they can't, I shall feel it my duty to stay where I am. But I have not much of an idea that this will be necessary. They're neither of them foolish, and they'd have been doing more than half the work long ago if I'd have let them. So I think you may count upon me. And one thing I'm writing for is to say, in thorough earnest, that I don't want you to do any thing to the room you're going to give me, nor to make a fraction of a change in your way of living when I come. If you find a late dinner suits you best, I can make mine just as well when you have your lunch, and I hope we can live in the same house without wanting to whittle each other into a new shape about any thing. It's the only way to live peaceably, as you'll know when you're as old as I am, if you don't before."

Muriel was a little vexed by the injunction about the room; she had pleased herself with thinking of various luxuries and prettinesses which could be added to the rather stiff, if entirely comfortable, apartment; but she knew that Aunt Sally would detect the additions, and only be distressed by them, so she gave up her own wish in the matter. She had decided to give Aunt Sally one of the large square rooms

in the main body of the house, partly because it communicated with the one which she herself occupied; not directly, but through a closet, which was between the front and back rooms, so that it could be entirely separated when they so desired. These rooms were on the southern side, and Muriel, when she was first left alone, had chosen the front one for her bedroom, because the small room over the wide front hall opened from it as well as from the hall, and here Margery had slept. But when Muriel told Margery about Aunt Sally's coming, a look of relief was quite visible upon the worthy woman's face, and after all the arrangements of which Muriel, in her restricted condition, could think, had been settled upon, Margery said:

"I'm thinking, Miss Muriel, that when you have Miss Bowne in the next room to you, you'll no longer be needing me in the hall bedroom?"

"Why, no, Margery," replied Muriel, "I suppose I shall not exactly need you, though I have grown so used to having you there that I shall certainly miss you. Did you wish to go back to your own room?"

"I'll not deny that I'd like it, Miss Muriel. You see, my things are all there, and its as near fifty as forty years that I have slept in it now, and old people don't take to changes as young ones do. And then I was thinking most young ladies have a dressing-room, as well as a bed-room, as is no more than proper, and how would it be if we took the bedstead out of that little room, and moved your washstand and bureau in there?"

"I think that would be very nice," said Muriel, falling in at once with the idea, because she saw that Margery felt a little uncomfortable about deserting her, and this would entirely restore her to peace of mind; "but wouldn't this room look a little bare without the bureau between the windows?"

"I had an arrangement in my mind, Miss Muriel, if you should like the plan of having a dressing-room—there's an old-fashioned dressing-table with a swing-glass, that was sent to the third story when your grandfather refurnished these rooms. It's far handsomer than a good deal that the ladies buy out of the second-hand shops now-a-days, and make such a time over, and what if I had that brought down and put in place of the bureau?"

"I should like that very much," said Muriel, cordially. "I remember it well, now that you speak of it. I used to keep my dolls' clothes in those little lower drawers, but you'll have to keep all the brass handles and plates about it as bright as you keep my fender and andirons, Mrs. Margery, or I'll not have it at all!"

"There's no fear, Miss Muriel. Then I may ask Rogers to attend to bringing it down? There's a man at work in the garden to-day that could help him."

"Yes; and Margery, I'm so glad you spoke of that dressing-table, for it's made me think of something else. There's a very blank place in the back room, between the back window and the wall, you know, and I think I'll have the high chest of drawers brought down from the third story and put there. I know Aunt Sally likes old-fashioned things, and since she has tied me down about buying any thing for the room, I will see what we can do with things that are in the house. Can you think of any more pretty old-fashioned things that are in the third story? You know a great deal better what is in the house than I do."

"If you'd just come up there, and in the garret with me, my dear," said Margery, persuasively, "I could show you every. thing; it isn't fitting for you not to know what is in your own house! You see, when your grandfather refurnished the greater part of the house, your grandmother begged him not to send away the nicest of the old furniture, and he

heeded her ; so what could not well be put into the third story, was stored away in the garret, and there's enough, I do believe, with what could be thinned out from the other rooms, and not missed, to furnish six or seven more rooms, quite comfortably. Come, Miss Muriel, i'ts rainy to-day, and not likely any one will come in to disturb you, and you'll not be wanting, may be, to take the time after you have Miss Bowne here. I'll not keep you more than an hour or two, and then it will be done ! "

So Muriel went, willingly enough, laughing at Margery's persistency, but listening and looking with real interest as Margery exhibited and described and suggested, and praising the entire absence of dust, which praise gave nearly as much offense as pleasure.

" I don't know what you think I'm here for, Miss Muriel ! " said Margery, at last, in injured tones, " if I'd let dust gather any where in the house, when that overfed housemaid has not enough to do to keep her out of mischief ! Once a week, without fail, every room in this house is swept and dusted, used and unused alike, and will be, so long as I am in charge and have my faculties ! "

" And you call the poor housemaid idle, when she does all that, and does it so nicely, too ! Oh Margery ! I'm afraid some of your ancestors thought bricks could be made just as well as not without straw ! "

One or two old-fashioned chairs and footstools, and a remarkable piece of embroidery representing a shepherd and shepherdess, who would have been obliged to crawl on their hands and knees in order to enter their thatched house in the " middle distance," were selected for Aunt Sally's room ; the frame of the embroidery had once been very handsome according to old-time ideas of beauty, but it was sadly tarnished now, and Muriel sent the willing Rogers immediately after lunch with a list of the requisite materials for

regilding it, and spent a cheerful afternoon and evening, in spite of rain and solitude, over the work, her mind busy all the time with plans and hopes for the near future, and thanksgivings that Aunt Sally had been so willing to come to her. She took her trophy when it was finished to display to Miss Post, who cheerfully praised it, although Muriel found that the picture was only half discerned by the failing eyes. The doctor's verdict was, as yet, unknown to Miss Post, and Muriel, calling herself a coward, put off telling it for one more day.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOUNDING THE DEPTHS.

"The earnest hour, if hope be true,
Must be solemn or sad; for the work we do
Is little and weak."

C. COURTHOPE BOWEN.

A SINCERE unwillingness needlessly to offend the prejudices of her Aunt Matilda deterred Muriel from asking the Raymonds to take supper with her on the evening of the day which Aunt Sally had elected for what Jack Osborne called "The Hegira."

She knew only too well, that even so small an affair as this would be could not escape the knowledge of that mysterious "little bird," who, in these latter days, seems ambitious of filling, at fasts as well as feasts, the place occupied at the latter by the classic skeleton. And by the time an account of the matter reached Mrs Hardcastle, it would be "an evening company, my dear—quite a gay little affair, I can assure you, although I am not positively certain that there was dancing; and it actually isn't three months since her poor dear grandfather's death!"

For herself, she thought, she would have simply disregarded uncalled-for comments, but she knew that the annoyance which her aunt would suffer would be very real, and she did not feel that she had the right to inflict it merely for her own gratification—an obligation would have been quite another thing. So she contented herself with

having supper instead of dinner, and asking Miss Post to join them, which she did, with the pleasure that every thing seemed to give her, and which often made Muriel feel ashamed of her own comparative thanklessness.

If Aunt Sally felt any remorse when it came to the actual parting with her children, she did not let any one else suffer for it, and Rogers was obliged to retire to the shelter of the pantry more than once during his ministration at the supper-table, which, fortunately for the preservation of his dignity, was once more set in the rightful dining-room. For it had occurred to Muriel that the use of the library as a dining-room gave her old servant a good many unnecessary steps to take, and that she was encouraging herself in the thing which she especially dreaded—morbidness. She did not mean, however, to punish, as well as correct herself, and decided to wait for Aunt Sally's advent to inaugurate the change, and also, in the mean time, to make the dining-room as cheerful as it could be made. It was at least three times too large for the comfort of a family of two people, so she searched a number of shops until she found a gay Japanese screen of unusual size, and with this she partitioned off the end of the room at which the butler's pantry lay, surprised herself at the change effected by this bit of bright color, for the division was, of course, somewhat imaginary, as the screen did not reach more than two-thirds of the way across the room. The windows were hung with heavy crimson curtains, which on cloudy days seemed almost to exclude the light; these Muriel had removed, and felt grateful to a reigning fashion which afforded her pretty, semi-transparent and quite translucent draperies in their place. Some quaint old engravings, which had come to light when the contents of the garret underwent inspection, were hung upon the high, bare walls, after having their tarnished frames regilt, as the frame of the piece of embroid-

ery had been; and Muriel made a prettily-looped draping of the curtain-stuff for the high, cold-looking marble mantle-piece, which had done more than its share toward the rigid look of the room. The improvement was so great that Muriel almost felt that the screen had been an unjustifiable extravagance. The room looked smaller, somehow, and so thoroughly cheerful and inhabited that the change seemed almost incredible.

Aunt Sally's genuine admiration of the room soon banished Muriel's last unpleasant feeling about it. Muriel had taken her into most of the rooms on a previous visit, not at all as a matter of policy, but the recollection of "that poor child all alone in that great tomb of a house" had not been without its influence in Aunt Sally's decision, and she was quick to praise every thing that had been done to banish the gloomy look which seemed to have taken the place, from year to year, of the dust so rigorously excluded by Margery.

"It's a curious thing to me, the difference there is in ladies," said Rogers, when supper was over, and Margery was helping him put away some little table-fineries which they had produced for Muriel's pleasure. "Now that old lady," he continued, "I should judge, from the little I have experienced of her, is a very good choice for one to live with Miss Muriel. I have an idea that the gloomy days here are over, at least for the present time. And I hope I may get used to her in a few days, and not be made to laugh quite so sudden as she made me several times this evening. But even if I should not, the pantry is handy now that we've moved back to the dining-room, for which I feel to be thankful, and it did my heart good to hear Miss Muriel laugh out so young and happy-like, the way she ought at her age. But they do say, Miss Margery, I've heard it from several sides, that Miss Muriel intends to turn this

house into a sort of asylum for poor ladies; which might not be so pleasant, even, as the old ways, and would make the work very different from what it's ever been yet."

"There's no compulsion on any body, that I know of," said Margery, in her grimmest manner, "to stay here when they'd rather leave. And I never knew a time when servants were plentier—such as they are."

With which parting shot she marched up-stairs, leaving the luckless Rogers a prey to wounded feeling. He had not the slightest idea of leaving his young mistress, even should she turn the house into an orphan asylum, but he was very curious as to the truth of the rumors which were, in fact, beginning to be circulated about Muriel, and he had an idea that Margery would be among the first to be able to inform him.

It pleased Muriel to see Miss Post take up her knitting after tea, and work easily on at it as she talked, scarcely even glancing at it.

"How well you do that!" she said, after watching for awhile the rapidly-moving fingers. "You never drop a stitch, or make a mistake. I've often tried to knit without looking, but I always get it into a hopeless snarl immediately."

"I learned when I was a girl," replied Miss Post, "one time when my eyes were weak, and I was obliged to rest them. I knew I should look if I left my eyes free, so I used to bandage them every time I took up my knitting, and it was surprising how soon I learned to go entirely by feeling. I am glad enough of it now, for I really think my sight grows worse every day. I've been wanting to ask you, Miss Muriel, if Dr. Ellis told you any thing more than he told me—that my general condition was very poor, and needed a great deal of building up, before he could do much to help my eyes."

"Yes," said Muriel, bravely, "he did. He hopes very

much to be able to restore your sight entirely a few months from now, Miss Post, but, in the meantime, and before he can do any thing directly to your eyes, you will become, he says, totally blind."

"Then it is cataract?" asked Miss Post, quietly, and with none of the agitation which Muriel had feared.

"Yes," assented Muriel, "and that you know, is very frequently cured. But he says that all depends upon keeping up your strength and general health in the interval. So I am going to be a perfect dragon if you don't take as much beef-tea and milk, and strengthening food as I think you should; and you must only use your eyes when the light is very bright, and even then not very long at a time."

"I had guessed sometime ago what the trouble was," said Miss Post, with a composure so evidently genuine that Muriel was amazed; she had expected a very painful scene, when this disclosure should be made; for, in her limited experience, the thing which went by the name of "resignation to the Divine will" was any thing but cheerful in its nature. She looked at the calm, sweet face, the busy hands, and a text, which always recalled to her a stirring sermon which she had once heard upon it, flashed into her mind:

"Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering, *with joyfulness*."

Yes, this was the religion of Christ Jesus. A faith; which never wavered, a love which "believed all things" and a feeling of positive envy contracted her heart; with this for a possession, what, indeed, did any thing else, coming or going, matter to the glad possessor?

"I think," resumed Miss Post, as no one else seemed inclined to speak, "that I can sew upon white work for several weeks longer, for at least half the day; so now, Miss Muriel, we must arrange things upon a new basis. So long

as I am able to do this, I will gladly stay with you, only my wages must not exceed two dollars a week, and I am afraid I shall hardly be worth even that to you. And when I become wholly unable to work, I shall say good-bye to you, but only for a few months, I hope. Mr. Dwight, my minister, has some influence at the City Hospital, and I think he will have no trouble in arranging for me to go there, even though I should have to wait some little time for the operation. How wonderfully I have been cared for! I feel so hopeful about the result of the operation now, but if I had continued to live as I was living when you offered me this lovely home, I do not believe I should have had much chance for the recovery of my sight. I feel as if I could never find the right words for all my gratitude."

Muriel laid both hands over the flying fingers, and held them fast while she said :

"Dear Miss Post, I want you just to 'pretend,' as the children say, for a moment. Pretend that you found yourself in possession of a comfortable home, and a great deal more money than you needed for your own wants, and that—Aunt Sally, we will say, saving her presence, came to you for a visit, and you found that she was growing blind, and had no settled home. What would you do with her?"

"Why, Miss Muriel, what a question! I'd *keep* her, of course I would—if I had to tie her to the bed-post."

And Miss Post laughed, in evident amusement at the vision of the energetic Miss Bowne tied to a bed-post by any one no more powerful than herself.

"Then," continued Muriel, "you wouldn't let her go to a hospital, even to be cured?"

"Miss Muriel, you are just setting a trap for me! I see what you mean, my dear young lady, and I bless you for meaning it, but ought I to take this help from you, when there are so many, many people within our reach whose

needs are so much greater than mine, and who can not, perhaps, find entrance to hospitals or charitable institutions?"

"If you go by that," said Aunt Sally, who found it perfectly impossible to keep her oar out any longer, "nobody would ever take any thing from any body!"

And, nowise disconcerted by the laughter which greeted this apothegm, she continued:

"You know what I mean, both of you, perfectly well! And no one person can help and comfort every body—at least, not directly—but it always seems to me that there would be mighty few unhelped and uncomforted people in the world, if each one of us 'lent a helping hand' to the people we could reach. And if the Lord has put it into Muriel's heart to reach a hand to you, Miss Post, I don't think you need hesitate to take it, because it can't be given to every body."

"Perhaps I need not," said Miss Post, simply, "and at least, I will not refuse this great loving kindness to-night. We will see how long the time of entire darkness seems likely to be, and if it is not to be very long, I shall be sorely tempted to take this good gift. But there is one thing, Miss Muriel, of which, perhaps, you have not thought. I shall need, I am afraid, a little help in various small ways when my sight is entirely gone, and it will not be right for me to call upon your servants for this, kind as they have shown themselves to me."

"That reminds me," said Aunt Sally, before Muriel could speak. "The little girl will be glad and thankful to come, Muriel, just for her 'victuals and clothes,' as her aunt says, and she is ready whenever you are."

"Then that gives me the answer to your objection, dear Miss Post," said Muriel, and she proceeded to explain who the little girl was, and what her duties would be.

"And I am, honestly, very glad of an excuse to make the

experiment of taking her," added Muriel, "I don't think I should have dared to propose it to Margery without an excuse, for she has had, ever since I can remember her, a theory that the servants have not half enough to do, but she saw the reasonableness of it at once, when I told her about it, and I think she has private designs upon the unfortunate child in the way of lessons in dusting and scouring! I have often thought that if people would be willing to take very young girls, mere children, into their homes and teach them carefully, we might not hear quite so much of the 'awfulness' of servants."

"Yes, that was the way mother always did on the farm," chimed in Aunt Sally; "we were never without one or two 'taken girls,' for years and years."

"Will you be kind enough to tell me what a 'taken girl' is, ma'am?" inquired Muriel.

"Sure enough!" said Aunt Sally, "I suppose that might be called an obsolete expression. Why, my dear, in those remote days, the fathers and mothers of some of the country-girls, who had plenty of children, and not quite such a plenty of money, were glad enough to let the well-to-do farmers take their girls to bring up, and I suppose that's how they came to be called 'taken girls'—though they were called 'bound-girls,' too, for they were bound out nearly always, and I suppose that's just as much Greek to you as the other is! The fathers and mothers would sign an agreement not to take the child away, or molest her, until she was eighteen—that was the age they set usually, though it could be made whatever they chose to agree upon, and the family who took her would promise to provide her board and clothing and to give her a comfortable outfit, or money, or sometimes both, when she was free. It was a risk, of course, for both sides, but so far as my observation went it worked well much oftener than badly. In

the first place, it gave the girl a settled feeling ; she knew she couldn't go whisking off the first time she thought the work too hard, or somebody said something she didn't like, and generally a nice girl would soon come to identify herself with the family,and take a pride in her work ; and I know of two or three instances in our neighborhood where the girls staid right on after they were free, for wages, of course, and lived as long as twenty or thirty years in the same family. But that didn't happen very often, I'm free to confess. They generally married soon after they were free, and in some instances the people who had taken them were glad and thankful when the time was up and they could get rid of them."

"I almost wish we might make some such arrangement about this little girl," said Muriel ; "then I could take some comfort in teaching her, and let myself get fond of her ; for, from what you have said, I think I shall like her."

"Yes, I think you will, or I wouldn't have undertaken to bring her here. But, my dear, if you are only to have her a month, instead of five or six years, that's all the more reason for trying to teach her as much as you can *while* you have her, and in such a way that she'll feel thankful all her life for the chance she had of being with you. We have to sow a good deal of seed without trying to find out who will do the harvesting, but we may be quite sure somebody will, if the sowing's done right. It's discouraging sometimes, I'll admit, to see no result of our work and our prayers, but we mustn't *be* discouraged."

"It will be pleasant to have a child about me once more," said Miss Post, contentedly. "I was always the one at home to help mother with my younger brothers and my little sister, and they were about as fond of me as they were of her ; how long, long ago it seems !"

"And where are they now?" asked Muriel, with kindly interest."

"In Heaven, I hope," replied Miss Post, reverently. "The boys both died young, and my sister when she was thirty. She and I had never been separated for a single day before her death; for after mother died, and we were obliged to give up the house, we took a room together and learned dressmaking and millinery; she was the milliner. We had money enough to keep us while we learned our trades, and a little left to put by in case of illness, and we succeeded very nicely while she lived, and even after her death I made enough to put by a little every year for a few years. But I missed her; she always had more courage than I have; I used to think she would not be afraid to undertake any thing, and she would keep up with the fashion of the day, and make me do it too; I tried to go on as I knew she liked me to, but somehow I couldn't; so after awhile I took plain sewing whenever I could get it, in preference to dressmaking, and that, of course, did not pay so well. But I've nothing to complain of; I've always had enough to eat and wear, and a comfortable bed to sleep in, and how many women there are who have lost work and what little money they had, and suffered from hunger and cold! I often wonder at the way in which I have been helped, through no deserving of my own, and long to help others in the same way, but I don't seem to have found or made many chances to do that."

Muriel was on the point of saying some of the things which crowded into her mind, about the help which "the patience and faith of the saints" gave unconsciously, but she stopped herself—it would only bewilder and distress Miss Post, and perhaps take something from the unconsciousness which gave such weight to her example. But she did extract a promise that Miss Post would do nothing about entering the

hospital without first giving notice of her intention, and with this promise Muriel contented herself for the present.

Aunt Sally was so evidently tired that Muriel was very glad when Miss Post said good-night, a little before ten, and as soon as she was out of hearing Muriel rose, saying: "Your room is all ready, aunty, and now I'm going up with you to see if you have every thing you want, and put you in a proper frame of mind to dream a nice dream, for you know it will come true—your first dream in a strange room!"

"I'd be hard set if I hadn't every thing I wanted in that room," replied Aunt Sally, taking Muriel's offered arm as she spoke. "I hadn't time before tea to look at every thing, but it somehow seemed to me as if I'd come back to a place I'd lived in once before."

"You don't *know* how glad you make me, by saying that!" cried Muriel, joyfully. "I hoped you would feel so; Margery and I did our best to make it look home-like, but I was afraid it would seem stiff and strange to you after that cosy little flat. All the rooms nearly, here, are so much too large for every day use, and the furniture is so massive and dark, that it helps to give a gloomy look to the house. There are things stored away in the garret—the things, Margery says, which grandpapa found here when he inherited the house—that I like a great deal better than the ones he bought."

"Yes," said Aunt Sally, "there was a time, a good many years before this craze for old furniture came in, and more yet before people talked about 'Art' in every thing, when they took it into their heads, the ones who could afford it, to banish all the old things, and have every thing new, and I do think, for awhile, the cabinet-makers must have tried how sinfully ugly they could make things! Now the really old ones, of the better kind, were made of real wood, of the kind they professed to be, and had their carving *done* on them, not stuck on with glue afterward, and there was a sort of

dignity about them, if there wasn't much grace! Still, I must say, that unless I had some special association with the old ones, I'd rather have the pretty, graceful, easily-moved things they're making now-a-days, than the ponderous bedsteads and bureaus that were made a hundred years ago. But one thing was worth keeping, and I'm glad they're reviving it, and that was the 'chest of drawers.' That one in the corner looks like an old friend. I have missed mine more than I have any of the furniture that was sold when I broke up at the farm. They're unhandy, in a sense—you have to mount up on a chair to reach the upper drawers, but somehow I always felt good and settled when I'd put my winter things away in those upper drawers, for the summer, and my summer things for the winter. I expect to take clear comfort out of that!"

"Now, Aunt Sally," said Muriel, whose face had brightened with this exordium until she, at least, looked far from sleepy. "I'm not going to let you sit up any longer, or I shall not believe that I have you 'to keep,' as the children say; it's too much as if you were going to-morrow, and I were obliged to make the most of my time! Kiss me good-night and go to bed!"

"I am tired, child, but I s'pose I'm a little excited, too. Old folks don't take transplanting as young ones do. Tell me what time you have breakfast, and then you may go."

"At eight o'clock. Shall Margery call you?"

"I don't think she need. I have been the first one up in the house for more years than you've been in the world, and I believe I'd wake if I'd only been asleep an hour, with the first streak of light, or the first noise in the street."

Perhaps this vain-glorious speech was accountable for the fact that when Muriel, the next morning, being nearly dressed, and hearing no sound from the next room, first knocked softly, and then opened the door, she found Aunt Sally

sleeping like a baby. With mischief sparkling in her eyes, she was about to close the door as quietly as possible, and leave the victim to her fate, but the noise, slight as it had been, was sufficient to wake her, and she was only a few minutes late for breakfast.

"I'm so sorry I opened that door!" said Muriel, when Aunt Sally had expressed her opinion of herself for making such a beginning, without considering it necessary to mention that she had not closed her eyes till three o'clock. "If I'd only let you alone I do believe you would have slept on till dinner-time, and you did look as if you were enjoying it so."

"I think you'd better call me, or ring a bell, at seven o'clock after this," said the old lady, with unwonted meekness. "I suppose it does people good to be taken down once in a while, but they don't enjoy it any the more for that."

Muriel felt all day as if the air had become more bracing, the sunshine brighter. She found herself singing, as she went about the house, for the first time in all the years of her life there. Margery's joy over the change was not expressed, but "took itself out" in quiet attentions to Aunt Sally.

If Muriel had expected any immediate advice or suggestions as to the vague ideas which she hoped to crystallize into forms of usefulness she was disappointed, for several days passed, and, beyond helping Muriel to carry out the plans concerning the little waiting-maid, Aunt Sally showed no sign of acting as mentor. She was not idle, however, but was making notes for future reference. She saw that Muriel was more inclined to dream and plan and speculate than to take any very active steps toward the fulfillment of her dreams, and for this it was easy to account. The life of repression and loneliness that she had led for so many

years had made her mistrustful of herself, and her tendency was to reject her projects, upon considering them, and try to find something better. Even in the small matter of her order at the hothouse she was already dissatisfied, and was thinking of countermanding it. Aunt Sally had very soon penetrated to the truth about the supply of flowers, which, coming every other day, had at first seemed to her frugal mind an unjustifiable extravagance, and she soon saw, too, that but for Margery they would not fulfill their mission. The latter either took them herself to people of whom she knew in the neighborhood, or made suggestions to Muriel as to their destination. So, too, about the steps to be taken after the purchase of the property concerning which Muriel had talked with Mr. Keith. This purchase had been effected, and they were waiting her orders as to the next step. The elder Mr. Keith, having concluded the business which had been absorbing his time when she last sent for him, had called to see her when the transaction was completed, to express his satisfaction in it, and his confidence that it would prove a good investment, as well as his pleasure at the confidence in himself which she had shown, and which, he assured her, he should always do his best to justify. She asked for a little time in which to decide upon her wishes, and he courteously assured her that there was no hurry. The taxes on the property were comparatively light, and something might occur which would serve as a suggestion as to the best employment of her purchase. It had crossed his mind, he said, that perhaps a block of small, neat houses, built at a cost which would, for the present at least, permit low rents, would bring a quicker and surer return than any thing else, as they would rent very readily to people employed in the neighborhood. This idea pleased Muriel, but she was not quite ready to give a positive order that it should be carried out, and Mr. Keith himself evi-

dently thought it best to do nothing hastily. After he went away Muriel was seized with a desire to see her new acquisition, and asked Aunt Sally to go with her the next morning, briefly explaining the facts of the case and her own state of indecision.

Aunt Sally scented the battle afar off, and responded to the invitation with great alacrity. So they set forth soon after breakfast the next morning, taking a car almost immediately, as the distance was quite too great for the "senior partner's" walking powers, and Muriel declared that it would be a waste of time, when people were going on business, to walk when riding was possible.

They found the place without any difficulty, from Mr. Keith's directions, and Muriel knocked bravely at the first door of the forlorn-looking row of houses, determined to see for herself what manner of people lived in them, and what the result would be should she decide on a general "eviction"—which must, of course, be the first step should any change be made. A tired-looking woman opened the door, and stood looking at them with evident astonishment, and no favor. She did not ask them to come in. They saw that she had just risen from a sewing-machine, beside which was piled a quantity of course sewing.

"Will you please let us come in for a few minutes?" said Muriel, gently; "I would like to have a little talk with you. I will not detain you long."

"If you want to leave tracts, or talk religion, I've no time for either," she replied, in a voice still more sullen than her face, but she moved aside as she spoke, opening the door wider to let them in, and even setting chairs for them. There was no fire in the room, and it was chill and dark by contrast with the warm April sunshine from which they had just come. Muriel saw that the house was only one room deep, and that the yard was so small that the

great warehouse immediately behind the row cut off both light and air. A very small stove, a table, and three or four wooden chairs comprised the furniture ; there were no curtains or blinds of any sort at the two windows, which were opposite, back and front. Rag-carpet covered part of the floor. The walls had evidently been whitewashed not very long ago, but only with one coat, and the various discolorations of the plaster showed through the very superficial whiteness. Altogether, the place looked utterly, hopelessly comfortless, and Muriel could not help contrasting its appearance with the happy-go-lucky expression of a negro-cabin on the extreme outskirts of the city, into which she had once happened to look in passing—rags and dirt were manifest there, but somehow they failed to effect the look of squalor and privation which this clean and decent room wore.

Muriel felt her courage ebbing, and began the attack at once. She frankly stated the reasons for her intrusion, and asked the woman to tell her whether the inhabitants of the row would be put to any thing more than temporary inconvenience by a notice to quit.

"I don't undertake to answer for any body else," the woman replied, "but if you really want to know my views about the matter, you're welcome to them ! These houses are old and shabby, and inconvenient ; they're hot in summer and cold in winter, but I took this one, after a long hunt, because it was the only one, with a rent that I could pay, that was in a decent neighborhood. I suppose it doesn't seem decent to you—" and she looked Muriel over critically, in a way which made her wince, "but if you could see the streets where most of the cheap houses are, you'd understand, may be, what I mean. Groggeries, and worse, about every other house. Noises at night that won't let you sleep. Air that it's poison to breathe. I saw you look at

that dead wall that's almost against the window, but a dead wall's better than a whiskey-mill, if you're trying to keep two boys from following their father to ruin, and warehouses are better than some other kinds of houses, if you've a daughter who's too good-looking for her safety. She can come home here when her day's work's done, without being insulted or tempted on her very doorstep. If I'm driven from here, I've no time for the hunt I'd have to make for another home as decent. I'll have to take what I can get soonest and cheapest, and let the worst come if its coming. That's all I have to say."

"But you shall not, you shall not!" cried Muriel, springing to her feet, and taking the woman's rough hands in both her own, "I promise you, solemnly, and with this lady for my witness, that if I ask you to leave this house, I will first find one for you as cheap, as safe, and far more comfortable. You believe, you trust me, do you not?"

The woman looked fixedly in the glowing, quivering face before her for a moment; she made no attempt to draw her hands away.

"Yes," she said at last, "I believe you; I'll trust you, and I'd say God bless you if I believed there was any God. Now you'd better go; I can't quit my work any longer, and the old lady's shivering—she's not used to being chilled to the bone."

She adjusted her work upon the rickety machine, and Muriel and Aunt Sally went. They had not learned to regard the very poor as a "class," with no social rights which the very rich and very benevolent are bound to respect.

"Oh," said Muriel, almost with a groan, as she closed the door, "I thought I knew about poor people—Margery has taken me to places—but I never saw any thing like that! And there must be hundreds of just such cases—oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

"The best thing that lies nearest to your hand, my dear," said Aunt Sally, "and be thankful you've the means and strength and time to help, instead of having your hands tied by sickness or poverty. Not that I think any body's hands are ever wholly tied; I shall never believe that, I hope, but some people do seem to have more chances given to them than others have, and you're one of the favored."

"I don't know," said Muriel, "I think sometimes, often, that I'd much rather be poor. I'm so afraid of doing more harm than good, of making mistakes, that I feel as if my hands *were* tied. Now, I don't believe that poor, fierce woman, for instance, would take money, if I were to try to give it to her."

"Perhaps she wouldn't, just yet," replied Aunt Sally, "and it doesn't seem to me that is the sort of help she needs, either. That's the mistake so many good people make; they're ready enough to give money, but not love, or time, or thought. And yet, if they read their Bibles I don't see how they can help noticing that in all the years of our Saviour's ministry on earth there is but one instance recorded in which He gave money, and that was not to a poor person, but to keep Himself from being the cause of a quarrel about tribute-money. But we are told that He came 'to seek and to save that which was lost,' 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' And it seems to me that there's an inner meaning in that incident of the tribute-money which mostly escapes notice—it proves that if He had thought it wise to give money, He had only to will, and He could have done it. Money's worth He gave over and over, food to hungry people, health to the sick; and though we're only told in one case that the sick person had 'suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,' I've no doubt there were plenty of just such des-

perate cases, for they'd be the very ones who would be eager to come to Him. And the wine at the marriage feast was money's worth, too. And the great catch of fishes, when they'd toiled all night and taken nothing. So I don't mean, far from it! that He set people an example of not giving, but that He showed them the way to give. And another thing that I saw in a book I once read—a story; He nearly always *touched* the poor things with His own hands; when, if He had willed it so, He could just as well have said, always, as He did once, as if to show that it was possible, 'I will; be thou clean!'"

Aunt Sally stopped, for slowly as they had walked they had come to the end of the row.

"Shall you try another house, my dear?" she asked.

"Yes," said Muriel, "I meant to try at least two."

And she knocked at the door of the last house, without noticing that the window had a little shelf across it, on which a few jars of candy were displayed.

"Come in!" called a brisk voice, and Muriel opened the door, thereby rousing to action a sharp little bell which struck two fierce notes, and then stopped with equal suddenness.

A narrow counter shut off about a third of the room, and behind this counter sat a small, brisk-looking woman with sharp black eyes, an obvious "front" where her own hair had presumably once been, and a good-humored mouth, which, as Aunt Sally afterward remarked, "took the edge off her eyes." She was sewing, but rose as they entered, saying with evident amusement:

"Well, you're the first people I've ever met who were so extra polite as to knock at a shop door!"

"I beg your pardon," said Muriel, confusedly, "but I didn't see the window until after I'd knocked. Will you give me a pound of the different sorts of candy, please?"

"I don't know as there's a pound in the whole collection!" said the woman, with a good-natured laugh, adding, as she proceeded to empty her jars into the small scales on the counter:

"You see there's not a great deal of call for candy in this neighborhood, but sometimes a child happens on a penny, and brings it here to spend and that gives me a chance, but I never keep much on hand, for I don't want to give the poor little souls stale trash, and I always buy of a good maker who won't poison them. There is a pound after all, and two sticks to put back in the window! I didn't think I'd so much left!"

She wrapped it up deftly, and Muriel paid for it, and then, after a moment's hesitation, said:

"I hope you will not think me impertinent if I ask you one or two questions. Would it put you to any great trouble or cause you any loss, to be obliged to move from this house?"

A look almost of dismay came over the woman's face as she answered:

"Why yes, I should think it would! The houses are so poor and out of repair that the rents are low for the size of them, and the neighborhood's so decent, compared with others, where rents are no higher, that I was thankful to come here from where I was, and so far as I know, pretty much every body in the row feels the same way. I s'pose if I went to the country, or even very far out on the edge of the city that I could get a better house for less than I pay here, but I shouldn't have the same opportunities, you see," and she glanced round at the three shelves behind the little counter. "I keep a sort of variety store—trimmings and buttons and needles and cotton, and even a few dry goods and groceries, besides that pound of candy, and a batch or two of ginger-bread and cookies twice a week.

I'm beginning to have quite a good trade, and the women in the alleys and courts a few blocks off—poor souls—have begun to come here for what little tea and coffee and spices and sugar they use. And that gives me chances to talk to them, and give them notions about their cooking and other work, and I don't know when I've been so pleased as I was yesterday, when one of 'em came of her own accord to ask me how I made the ginger-bread and if I thought she could learn to make them and bread. So you see, I'd be sorry enough to go, and there's a sort of report flying about that the row has changed hands lately, and that we're all to be turned out neck and crop. Do you know any thing about it? Is that what you've come about?"

Aunt Sally's eyes had fairly danced as the woman told her story; here was a beginning, a good beginning, toward a project which had occupied her thoughts for years. But she said nothing. She meant to wait and see what Muriel would do. Muriel's mind worked fast in the minute's pause which she made before answering, and her conclusion was that for the present, and in this particular case she had better not avow herself the owner of the property. She had an idea that it would at once throw a restraint over this frankly-speaking tenant of hers, and the chance seemed to her too good to be risked. So she merely said:

"Yes, it is true that some one has bought the row, and has been advised to pull it down, and build either a block of shops, or of houses which would command a much higher rent than these do, and I was desirous of ascertaining something about the tenants, and whether any real distress would be caused by giving them notice to leave."

"Then you must have some influence with the buyer," said the woman, shrewdly. "Perhaps you're his wife?"

"I am not any body's wife," replied Muriel, smiling and coloring a little; "but you are right in thinking that I have

influence with the purchaser, and I am very anxious to use it for the best."

"Well," said the woman, thoughtfully, "I suppose every body has a right to do what he will with his own, and there's no doubt that whoever has bought this block could make it yield three or four times, perhaps a dozen times, as much income as it's yielding now; but then, as it strikes me, whoever has bought it must be rich, and perhaps if he knew the mischief he'd do by turning adrift the dozen or so of families that live in these houses, he'd think twice about it. Money's a good deal, but it isn't every thing, by a long shot."

"I have not time to stop any longer now," said Muriel, without replying to these remarks, "but I am very much interested in what you have told me about your customers, and if you will let me, I would like to come again in a few days and have another talk with you, and I think my aunt would like to come, too, and if you would not mind, I am sure she could tell you of a few more things which would be nice to make and sell to those poor women in the courts and alleys."

"You'll be welcome, both of you, whenever you chose to come," was the ready reply, accompanied by a very pleasant smile, "but I can't promise to undertake more than I'm doing now in the way of cooking, for what with that and other things I have to attend to my hands are pretty full. Still, it wont hurt to talk it over. And if you have the chance, as I gather from what you say, that you have, I hope you'll say a good word for the tenants of this row. I don't know them all very well, but this much I can say, they're all decent-behaved people, who are earning their own living, and troubling nobody."

They left the shop, exchanging very friendly good-byes with the proprietor, and Aunt Sally said: "Muriel! if we

don't take hold and pull when the end of such a rope as that is put into our hands, we don't deserve ever to have another chance as long as we live."

"That's just what I was thinking myself, aunty, and I thought another thing. The whole firm of Keith and Sons and the other firm of Hardcastle and Co., may unite to suppress me, but that block will not be turned into shops—nor yet into houses with higher rents than those paid for the ones which now occupy it."

There was a ring of resolution in Muriel's voice which did Aunt Sally's heart good. Her real nature, so long controlled, suppressed, and nearly dwarfed by outward circumstances, was beginning to assert itself, and it seemed as if, in time, the tendency to doubt and vacillation might fall off, as the husk parts from the ripened grain.

"God bless you for those words, my dear," said Aunt Sally, fervently; "no doubt you'll have plenty of annoyance about the matter, but there can't be any real trouble, for the power is in your own hands, thanks to your grandfather's confidence in you. And it must be a comfort to you to know, since he put the power in your hands, that he would be pleased to have you make such uses as this of it. But I don't think we'd better make any more visits to-day. You look a good deal paler than you did when we started out. And we know pretty much the whole story now; it seems to me we couldn't have lit on a better woman than that last one, for finding out all we wanted to know. But I I wish I'd thought to ask her name. It never once occurred to me. What's that on your candy-bag?"

Muriel turned it around and found printed upon it, "Prudence Harley," with the street and number of the shop.

"Now that is right bright of her," said Aunt Sally, admiringly, "it advertises her every time she sells any thing.

What are you going to do with your pound of candy? not eat it, I hope?"

"No," and Muriel laughed a little; "I'm afraid that according to May Douglas's doctrine, I should 'drop into poetry,' of the extremely sentimental sort, if I were to eat a whole pound of stick candy, even of such superior quality as this is warranted to be—and doubtless is. I only bought it, in the first place, to give myself time to collect my thoughts, and then it occurred to me that it might do to use as Mr.—Duncan, was it?—uses his bunches of wild flowers."

A group of little ragmuffins, playing happily by and in the gutter, caught her eye as she spoke, and she walked boldly up to them, untying the bag as she went. They did not flee at her approach, as she had half feared they would; on the contrary, they turned as if by concerted action, and concentrated a six-fold stare upon her, while one very small boy, whose trowsers appeared to be in the act of swallowing him whole, made an indescribable grimace, and a gesture of mock admiration, at the same time ejaculating:

"Oh, my eye!"

"No, it's your mouth," said Muriel, holding out a stick of candy. "There's one for each of you," she added, and six small black hands, which showed faint traces of having once been white, were thrust eagerly toward her.

"Now she'll give us a track," said the spokesman of the group, "and ask us where we live, and try to hook us into her Sunday-school class."

He spoke with such entire freedom from embarrassment, and his dirty little face had such a knowing twist as he announced his expectation, that Muriel laughed outright. Then she said:

"You never were more mistaken in your life, young man. I haven't any Sunday-school class, nor any 'tracks,' but I

have some more candy, and I shall have an errand near here day after to-morrow morning, so if you will all be here at noon, as I go home, with *perfectly clean* hands and faces, I shall have a stick of candy and a cake for each of you."

"Honor bright, and no fooling?" questioned the speaker, severely.

"Honor bright, and no fooling!" repeated Muriel, affirmatively, "and you may bring six of your brothers and sisters, or friends if you like, but remember, every body's hands and face must be perfectly clean, or I shall not give the cake and candy at all."

"You don't mean to say," he indignantly demanded, "that if one of us hasn't cleaned hisself right, you wont give nothing to all the rest? Do you call that fair?"

"No," replied Muriel, "and that was not what I meant—don't be stupid. All the clean ones will get it, and none of the dirty ones. Now, do you understand?"

"You' ll have to 'scuse him, lady; he cracked his poor head on the ice last winter, and his mother ain't never had time to fill the crack up," remarked one of the larger boys, holding his candy in the corner of his mouth, as if it were a cigar, while he spoke. There was a peal of derisive laughter, mingled with hooting, from the rest of the group; the insulted youth caught his insulter's apology for a cap and hurled it into a conveniently-situated mud-puddle, and Muriel thought it wise to beat a hasty retreat. Aunt Sally was laughing quietly, and did not seem at all annoyed by the delay.

"They're sharp, those poor little wretches," she said, as Muriel joined her. "What are you going to do with 'em, my dear, if they succeed in 'cleaning themselves?'"

"I don't know, aunty," replied Muriel, with a perplexed face; "I almost wish already I hadn't spoken to them."

"That's a cowardly wish," said Aunt Sally, severely,

"and I wouldn't let it turn into 'quite.' We'll think a little between this and Thursday, and see what we can make out for the next best thing. It's always a good beginning, whatever may come next, for people to 'clean themselves.' And I'm curious to see how many of 'em will think it worth their while to do it."

CHAPTER IX.

ENLISTING.

"If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?
Not though earth and not though heaven
Pass away."

MURIEL had a great desire that her interview concerning the purchase of real estate might be with the elder Mr. Keith, but she hesitated about writing him a note to this effect, fearing that it would seem discourteous, for his son was certainly sufficiently conversant with her affairs to transact any business for her, and she did not wish to appear to distrust his ability. She laid her difficulty before Aunt Sally, who, after a frequent practice of hers, answered one question by asking another.

"Why don't you go down to the office this morning," she said, "and then, when the old gentleman comes forward, as he will, to speak to you and tell you how glad he is to see you, you can just keep him till you've said your say and heard as much as you want to of his."

"But I'm so afraid of interrupting and inconveniencing him if I do that," objected Muriel.

"It won't take him half as long to have a little talk with you," said Aunt Sally, stoutly, "as it would to read a note from you and answer it, and then, after all, you'd have to see him, I suppose, before you settled any thing positively and formally. Come! I'd go and have done with it, if I

were you ; you'll only feel unsettled and uncomfortable till you do."

"Aunt Sally, you make me think of Margery when she used to take me to the dentist. Well, I suppose you are right, so here goes!" and she ran lightly up-stairs for her bonnet.

She was gone so long that Aunt Sally began to feel "fidgetty," and went to Miss Post's room for a little quieting. She read aloud awhile as Miss Post, taking advantage of the brilliant sunshine, did some of the sewing which she kept ready for such opportunities, and then drifted back to the library, scolding herself for being so silly as not to "settle to" something instead of idling away a whole morning in such shameful fashion. Margery came, with an injured expression of countenance, to call her to the one o'clock dinner which she had, after some deliberation, agreed to have served to her when Muriel lunched, for Muriel was growing used to the very simple late dinner with which she was experimenting, and had decided to keep on with it, at least, for the present.

"There is no use, Miss Bowne, for you to let a good dinner spoil by waiting for Miss Muriel to come back from her pleasuring," said Margery, severely, as she saw signs of hesitation on Aunt Sally's part, and Aunt Sally meekly accepted the hint and took her solitary way to the dining-room, endeavoring to persuade herself that she was neither lonely nor homesick.

She had not much more than begun her dinner, when Muriel appeared with a face so bright and triumphant that Aunt Sally exclaimed, "Well?" with eager interest, but immediately added:

"You're not going to tell me a word about it till you've had your lunch! I can see it's all right however it is, and that's enough for the present, for I can see that you're hungry, too."

"Do I look so famished?" said Muriel, gaily. "I *am* hungry, I can't deny it, so I will mind you, this time aunty, and tell my adventure in the library, after the important business of eating is disposed of."

"I had no trouble at all in catching old Mr. Keith," she began, when they were settled in the library; "it was just as your prophetic soul foretold; he came forward to meet me, and seemed really glad to see me, dear old gentleman, and when I asked him if he could give me fifteen minutes, he said an hour, if I liked, for he happened to be quite at leisure just then—though I was sorry to find that this was because he had not been feeling well, and his sons had persuaded him to let them attend to something he was doing. But he insisted on it that it would not hurt him in the least to have a talk with me about my affairs, but that, on the contrary it would divert his mind from more perplexing matters—he was going to say 'important' and caught himself up, but not quite in time. So he took me into his own office, which is a delightful little room, with pictures and books, and a great desk, and such nice chairs! And he just let me talk on without once interrupting me, until I had said all that was on my mind about that row of houses, and several other things! I expected of course, that he would oppose me with all his might, and tell me that I was utterly unbusiness-like, and a great many more unpleasant things, but instead of that—just think of it, aunty!—he quite agreed with me. I am very nearly sure that grandpapa must have talked to him as he did to me, from one or two little things he said. We have not quite settled, yet, what it will be best to do—to repair those houses, and make them as comfortable as they can be made, or to tear the whole row down, and put up either another row of small houses, or else one large building, divided into apartments. Mr. Keith says he

thinks that if the right person could be found to manage it, that would, perhaps, be best, and when I said that they wouldn't have any yards if we did that, he said they could only have such very small ones anyhow, on account of that great warehouse at the back, that he did not think that consideration need count, and that, in the apartment-house, we could probably give them more comfort for their money than in any other way. The greatest trouble is to know what to do with them, while the change, whatever it may be, is being made. I spoke of the possibility of sending at least some of them to places in the country for the summer, and he said that if work could be found for them, that would be a very .good plan, but he was afraid that most of them would be unable to leave their occupation in the city. So he said that need not be settled just yet—that the first thing to do was to have plans and estimates made, and see what the cost of the different ways of building would be, and which could be ready for occupancy in the shorter time. He thinks the apartment house could be, and I saw that he inclined to that instead of a number of small houses —but I don't know—it seems to me that I would rather have ever so small a house all to myself, than an apartment of twice as many rooms with half a score of other families. Wouldn't you ? "

" Yes, as far as it's a matter of taste and sentiment, I would, of course ; but, Muriel, I made one discovery by living in a flat. I never could have got through the work as I did, and kept well, if there had been any stairs for me to climb a dozen times a day. I sometimes think they use women up more than all the rest of their work put together. Of course, if you build a big apartment house, you'll have to put in an elevator—though if every body felt as I do about them, they would not be a very profitable patent ! But it's a good thing that every body doesn't—and with that to save

them from going up and down stairs, and other arrangements to keep them from interfering with each other, I think there might be advantages which the small houses could not have."

"Perhaps, after all, we ought to take the one which will cost least," said Muriel, "there are so many, many things to do with the money. And that reminds me—Mr. Keith says that two of his recent investments for me have turned out so unexpectedly good, that they will about make up, for this year anyhow, for the almost no-interest on the money invested in these houses. At first I felt sort of provoked, as if I had tried to make a present and the person to whom I was making it had insisted upon paying its full value! But then it suddenly struck me how foolish it was to feel that way, for it seems to me that it grows upon me every day, how much there is to do, and how a person could spend three or four times my income, and only make a beginning toward all the things that are needing to be done. But wasn't it wonderful, Aunt Sally, when I was so afraid to speak to Mr. Keith about this matter, that he should have met me half way, and made it all so easy?"

"Yes, it was wonderful, child—but its a wonder that's been repeated many times since Christian screwed up his courage to pass the lions, and found they were chained. It makes matters a great deal easier for you, there's no doubt about that. But, my dear, before you begin the fight I should think you'd wish to enlist, and say for whom you are fighting."

"If it were only as simple as that!" said Muriel, sighing.

"Well, and isn't it? 'He that is not with Me is against Me,' we are told, and 'whoso gathereth not with Me scattereth.' And you'll not grow any surer by waiting; if you're like most people, it will work the other way. I wish you'd

be willing to go to somebody wiser than either of us, and have a talk about this matter."

"I don't know," said Muriel, doubtfully, "it's so hard to talk about such things. The only person I can think of, to whom I would care to talk, is May's minister, Mr. Dwight. I've been with her several times to hear him, and liked him better every time, but wouldn't he think it strange to have a perfect stranger coming to him for advice and help?"

"I should think he'd be used to it by this time. He must have been in the ministry a good while, and been called on by a good many people before now. I've heard him preach, and met him, too, and I think you'd be very sure of an honest adviser, if you were to go to him. And if you'll tell me what you'll gain by delaying, perhaps I will admit that you'd better put it off awhile longer!"

"I suppose it is simply cowardice," said Muriel. "I fancied at first that it did not greatly matter—that I could work just as well before I settled it as afterward, and that all I needed was simply to do my best; it was something May said, which first made me feel differently, and now I feel anxious enough to 'enlist,' and yet afraid."

"My dear," said Aunt Sally, earnestly, "the last time I heard this very Mr. Dwight preach, he said something that I hope to remember. I don't know whether he quoted from somebody else or not, but what he said was, 'It is not we who are holding fast to God, but God who is holding fast to us.' Just you try to remember that, and let go of yourself! And don't be worried if you can't have that experience which is described so often in books, but which, I must say, has never come under my observation—of a sudden 'conversion,' as it is called, and every thing plain and easy and joyful afterward. It's the work of a lifetime, it seems to me, as a general thing, when people are really made over, and the great

thing is not to get discouraged because it doesn't all come at once. 'First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear'—not the whole thing at once, the day after we've planted it! Yet that's what some people seem to expect."

"I'll go to Mr. Dwight," said Muriel, with sudden resolution. "Perhaps May will go with me the first time, and introduce me to him; she knows him very well; but I'll go, anyhow!"

May acceded to Muriel's proposal with heartfelt pleasure. Miss Forsythe had for many years attended the church of which Mr. Dwight was rector. May had grown up in it, and joined its communion when she was about sixteen, and her attachment to it was very strong.

Mr. Dwight, who was between sixty and seventy years old, was not what is termed a "popular preacher;" his sermons were very earnest appeals for immediate and vigorous action—for proofs of faith and love in the lives of his hearers. And the influence of his church grew steadily; not rapidly, but very surely, and what was gained was nearly always kept.

Muriel was surprised, in looking back at her first interview with him, to think how completely he seemed to understand her, and how entirely unembarrassed she had felt. And she lost no time, after leaving him, in securing a pew in his church. May suggested a vacant sitting of which she knew not far from their own, in a pew already partly occupied, but Muriel, mindful of her still vague ideas as to the occupancy of her house, preferred to have a whole pew at her disposal.

"Of course, there are advantages in having the seats free," she said to May, "but I don't think I should ever feel really at home in a church where I sat in a different seat every Sunday. The only thing I don't like about it is, that it sometimes makes it harder for strangers."

"But it ought not to," replied May. "Now, in our church there are half-a-dozen pews which are never rented, and the sexton has orders never to let any one wait a minute; to be sure and show them at once to one of these pews. And we know enough, I hope, not to scowl if any one by chance takes a seat in any of our pews. It's like so many other things—people mix up the abuse of it with the use."

May's belief that no one who was thoroughly in earnest was ever "put in a hole" vindicated itself in Muriel, who, while it seemed to her just as difficult and solemn an undertaking to identify herself with the host which was marching against the forces of evil as it had ever done, felt it impossible to remain pledged, even by silence, to those evil forces. And Mr. Dwight only enforced the lesson of Aunt Sally's chosen text, "He that is not with Me is against Me."

"There is, there can be, no neutral party," he added; "those who think they belong to it are really worse than the open enemies. You are too young, Miss Douglas, to remember the war of the rebellion, or you would have a far more vivid conception than I can give you of the regard in which the so-called 'sympathizers' were held during that war; people who accepted all the advantages of the side of law and order, while in their hearts they defied the government which secured them these benefits. And remember the granted prayer of the man who added to his 'Lord, I believe!' the trembling cry, 'Help Thou mine unbelief.'"

And it was to this, when Muriel made the profession which she feared to make, lest she should disgrace it, that she held fast. She did believe, with all her heart, in the Love, the Sacrifice, the Power, which made all things possible; it was her own heart and soul that she doubted, and these she tried earnestly to put out of her own keeping into the wounded Hands of Almighty Love. No sudden clearing away of

doubts and fears followed ; indeed, it seemed to her, as it so often seems at such times, as if the conflict grew more fierce. But a new hope, a new strength, upheld her : the courage to walk on through darkness, if need be, awhile longer, before she should come out into the light.

She was more eager than ever now to let slip no "opportunity," and she very soon had ample and healthful occupation for all her time and thought, cheered and encouraged inexpressibly by the cordial sympathy and intelligent helpfulness of the elder Mr. Keith. She did not know why it always happened now that it was he instead of his son who attended to her business, but she was very thankful to have it so. She would have been both vexed and amused, could she have known the "true inwardness" of this pleasing state of affairs.

Mr. Douglas Keith had felt an uneasy suspicion, during Muriel's first interview with his father, which led him to investigate matters as soon as she was gone. He had no difficulty in doing so, for his father had not the slightest intention of concealing the purport of this interview, and quietly explained to his son the steps which were to be taken in furtherance of Muriel's wishes.

A habit of deference to his father kept the son silent until the explanation was finished, then his patience seemed to desert him, and as Aunt Sally would have expressed it, he "freed his mind," and in no measured terms.

"Do you really mean, father," he exclaimed, in tones of intense annoyance, "to encourage Miss Douglas in this crazy scheme, which is evidently only a beginning, and will probably lead, by no very slow degrees, to the squandering of the entire property, when a few words of advice from you could, perhaps, in this early stage of the proceedings, put a stop to the whole business ?"

"I like neither your tone nor your language, my son,"

said Mr. Keith, dryly, "but it will save us both future annoyance for me to be perfectly explicit now; you will understand, however, that what I am about to tell you is a confidence, and by no means to be repeated to any one. In the last interview of any length which I held with Mr. Hardcastle, he expressed a very strong wish that his granddaughter should be assisted, in every possible way, in whatever charitable schemes might suggest themselves, or be suggested to her, provided they were sensible and practicable, while at the same time I was requested to make sure that she did not leave herself without a sufficient income for her own support in the home in which, her grandfather said, it was his especial wish to secure her, that she might be entirely independent. He did not wish the principal encroached upon, but he did, very decidedly, wish that she should be perfectly free to spend the entire income. By your own account she has shown business capabilities unusual in a woman of her age and inexperience. I find her perfectly reasonable, and singularly amenable to advice and suggestion. I also find a pleasure, which fully compensates me for the slight loss of time, in attending personally to her affairs, and I shall not, I think, be obliged to call upon you again in this matter. But if I should, I hope what I have just said will be sufficient to your practical understanding of the true position of the case, and that no further explanation on my part will be necessary. And I need not say, I hope, that should you have any conversation with her in the future about her arrangements and wishes, you will avoid any thing which may appear like an offer of advice."

Mr. Douglas Keith had listened to this exordium with, at least, outward patience, and had carried on while listening a sort of accompaniment of thoughts suggested by it. By dint of heroic effort he cleared his cloudy face and answered his father readily and cheerfully.

"You are quite right, sir, and I was quite wrong, but you must admit that I sinned ignorantly. And since, as I find, you are so much better posted in this business than I am, and so much better qualified in every way to give advice, I I hope it may be as you say, and that you will find yourself able to attend to Miss Douglas's affairs unaided—an arrangement which, as I more than suspect, she would greatly prefer herself."

"I should not wonder if she would," replied Mr. Keith, with an indulgent smile. He was very glad to have this conversation with his son end in this manner, instead of in a marked disagreement and "unpleasantness," and he was careful not to refer to the subject again, when he could avoid doing so.

So Muriel's good fortune, as she considered it, continued, and her liking for the elder Mr. Keith grew and strengthened with every interview, while he surprised himself by the warm interest with which he entered into the project which was now engrossing her.

The two schemes of a large apartment house and a row of small, entirely separate dwellings, had been freely canvassed by Muriel with Aunt Sally, Miss Forsythe, May and Miss Post, and by Mr. Keith with a city missionary and an architect. Some more of the families in the row had also been talked with ; notes from all sides had been compared, and the result was a compromise which was, if possible, to secure the advantages of both plans and avoid the disadvantages which were most obvious in both. The house in the center of the row, which was to be separated from the others by a narrow alley on each side, was to contain a large kitchen, laundry and bakery, where, especially in summer, the tenants of the row might, for small payments, be allowed to do the work which would otherwise necessitate fires in their separate houses. The too-immediate neigh-

borhood of the warehouse was a great disadvantage, but Muriel reflected that if she began a search for another equally desirable site for the houses, the delay would probably be great, whereas, by prompt action, the row of new houses might be ready for occupancy early in the autumn. Besides, if the warehouse were a disadvantage in one way, there was compensation in the thought that it made impossible any more objectionable neighbors than its high walls, and this was a great deal.

The next step was to find temporary accommodation for the dozen families, some of them with lodgers and boarders "thrown in," for the four months which the contractor required. It was very possible, he said, that the houses would be ready sooner than in the time for which he stipulated, but much would, of course, depend upon his workmen, and he could not be sure.

Some of the tenants, upon hearing what was in prospect for them, very willingly bestirred themselves, and soon found temporary quarters; others seemed annoyed at being disturbed, even for their own good, and could hardly be convinced that the whole thing was not a design to "raise the rent on them."

It was when things were in this uncomfortable state, and Muriel was taking her first dose of real discouragement, that Miss Prudence Harley came to the front, and Muriel was quick to admit that a great good was the outcome of a comparatively small evil. Miss Prudence had, at least, a speaking acquaintance with all the dwellers in the row; she was on friendly terms with many of them, and they all seemed to like and respect her, so that a few well-chosen words from her went further than any thing Muriel could say. She went about, too, more than many of the others did, and she "took in" a daily paper, so that she could give valuable suggestions to the seekers of temporary lodg-

ings. She herself had formed a plan as soon as she was told of the building scheme. She had a married sister living near a remote country village, and with her she proposed to board for the summer. She recognized Muriel's real interest in the affairs of her tenants, and also the fear of seeming intrusive, which held her back, sometimes, in a way which was misunderstood, and in response to Muriel's hesitating question: "May I ask whether you have found a home for the summer, Miss Harley, and if you have, where it is?" she not only gave the desired information, but a good deal more, for after mentioning where she expected to bestow herself for the summer, she went on to say:

"She has five children, my sister has, and her husband farms a good bit of land, so she hasn't much time for fooling, and she's always saying that she doesn't see why I won't live with her, and let what work I choose to do—she knows about how much that would be—answer for my board. If she was poor or ailing I'd do it, though I don't pretend I'd enjoy it, for I wouldn't, and I never could see why a single woman must needs hang on behind any body's wagon, if she has sense enough to drive one of her own! But just for one summer it's different. I shall pay my board, whatever she says, and then I shall feel free to do her work or my own, to come or go, just as I please, and to carry out a plan that's come into my head. I don't know any place where fruit is as plenty or as cheap as it is up there. I spent a week there last fall, and they were giving away some of the best apples I ever saw, and Jane said it had been pretty much the same way with all the small fruits. You see, there are acres and acres of uncleared land—it's a wild sort of country—and the wild strawberries and raspberries, and blackberries and huckleberries are all to be had for the picking, and all first-rate, she says. She

showed me some red raspberries she'd put up, and they looked like red Antwerps rather than wild ones. So what I mean to do is to spend the most of my time putting up fruit in one way and another—a few preserves and a few more canned, but most of them dried, for I can sell them cheaper. I have no doubt of being able to sell all I can pick and put up, in the course of the winter, and I think the change will do me good, into the bargain."

"I think that is a capital plan," said Muriel, enthusiastically, "and I only wish—do you know that woman who lives at the other end of the row, Miss Harley?"

"Mrs. Boyce? Yes, I know her to speak to, but not very well. She's not what you'd call a neighborly person, poor soul, and I'm sure I don't blame her."

"Why? Has she had any great trouble recently?"

"I should say she had! Her husband and eldest son drank themselves to death a few months ago, and though she never opened her lips about it, she must have gone through enough to kill a good many people before they succeeded in killing themselves, and though her daughter's a good enough girl, I do believe, she's a lively, pretty, flirty little piece, without as much sense as she might have. The two boys are only about twelve and fourteen, I should judge, and they seem like nice, steady, well-behaved little fellows, but I'm afraid she's too strict and stern with them, and the sister doesn't seem to care a great deal about them. The oldest boy is cash-boy in one of the uptown dry-goods stores, and the youngest goes to school. The girl is a clerk in a big millinery store, and with her wages and what the mother makes, sewing day and night, pretty much, I judge, and the little the boy gets, they manage to live, but I think it must be a tight squeeze! You see, the girl has to keep herself neat and tidy-looking, or she'd soon lose her place, and I never saw any body with such a knack of making

something out of nothing. And that's one cause of her being misjudged, poor littleth ing ! She comes sailing out in one of her fix-ups, that looks as if she'd been melted and poured into it, and then the neighbors say she takes all her earnings to keep herself in finery, while her mother kills herself to keep the house."

"Do you know her first name and the name of the shop in which she works ?" asked Muriel.

"Her name is Lizzy, and she works for Bryan & Co., somewhere on Summer street, I don't know the number."

"Why, I know that store well," exclaimed Muriel, for it was the one in which Miss Forsythe was a book-keeper."

"She has a good place as far as the neighborhood and the way she's treated go," said Miss Prudence, "but I don't believe she gets very good wages—she hasn't been there long, for one thing."

"Then," said Muriel, "it would not be possible for that family to go out of town for the summer—I suppose Lizzy and the boy would both lose their situations ?"

"Yes, they would, and they both had trouble enough to get them, I reckon. And Robert's such a nice steady boy that I look for him to get an advance if he sticks to his work, as I think he will. They're very friendly with me, both those little fellows, and I always contrive to get one of them if I have an errand to be done. Robert is free after seven o'clock in the evening, and glad enough to earn a little extra money."

"If there were only some nice, safe, quiet place for Lizzy and Robert to stay for a month or two," said Muriel, talking her thoughts aloud, "what a good plan it would be to find board at a farm-house for Mrs. Boyce and the little boy. What is his name, Miss Harley ?"

"Fred, his brother calls him, but his mother's always very particular to say Frederick. I've no more time to talk just

now, Miss Douglas. I'm *very* sorry, but it's my baking-day, and I begin to smell the ginger-bread, but if you'll drop in the next time you're down this way I think I can tell you something you'd like to hear."

"Oh, I hope it isn't spoiled!" said Muriel. "Please go right away. I'll come to-morrow afternoon, if you'll not be busy then—will you?"

"No, indeed, and I'm very sorry to seem so rude now, but I can't help it!" and she dashed into her kitchen with a hasty "Good-by!" thrown over her shoulder as she went.

Muriel perplexed herself with plans for the Boyces all the way home, but arrived at no satisfactory settlement of the problem, so she spread it before Aunt Sally as they amicably discussed—the one her dinner, the other her toast and tea.

A long and interesting discussion followed, but still seemed to suggest nothing until after they had been comfortably settled in the library for some little time, and Muriel was reading aloud the "leader" in the evening paper. She suddenly interrupted herself to exclaim:

"Aunt Sally! I do wonder if this isn't my second opportunity!"

"How you made me jump, child!" said Aunt Sally, poking about for the stitch which her "jump" had caused her to drop. "If what isn't your second opportunity?" The war we're likely to have with China, if some of the fools don't die suddenly, and pretty soon?"

"No, dear!" said Muriel, laughing at the vindictiveness with which this suggestion was made. "I will confess that my mind had wandered quite away from China to my row, and settled upon the house where Mrs. Boyce lives, and I was going all over it again—how nice it would be to send her to the country and let her sew there, or do housework

for the overworked 'Jane,' while little Fred picked berries and gathered apples for Miss Prudence, if only we had the right sort of place in which to put the flighty Lizzy and steady Robert, and all at once, it flashed across my mind, What are all these empty rooms for?"

Aunt Sally leaned forward and kissed Muriel on the forehead—a somewhat unusual amount of demonstration on her part—and said, "My dear, I've been the worst sort of a coward! That very thought came into my head when you first told me, but I didn't dare to mention it. I thought you'd think me a meddlesome old fool!"

"Aunty! If you dare to use such language about yourself and me, I'll sue you for defamation of character! Now, promise me, solemnly, that after this you'll tell me your inspirations as fast as they occur to you, and not wait to have them wrung out by my halting suggestions!"

"I can't quite promise that, child. I think of too many queer things. But at least I'll not be afraid to, again, and not misjudge you, as I see I've done this time."

"I suppose I must take that and be thankful! But now, just listen! You know there's a room right back of Miss Post's bedroom, opening into the entry; it's a little bit of a room, but bright and sunny, and as Lizzy would be away all day, I think it would be large enough, for I mean her to spend a good many of her evenings with Miss Post! And there's the corresponding room in the third story, which would do for the boy. Don't you see? I could put them in some of the other rooms, of course, but I have a feeling sense that I shall want those larger rooms before long, not for larger people, but for people who don't go out to work all day. And besides, I've an idea that Mrs. Boyce is as proud as Lucifer, and would not let them accept any very heavy obligations."

"That's very likely," said Aunt Sally, "and at any rate

it will be better for them not to make the obligation too heavy. There's one thing you'll have to learn, my dear, for the sake of the people you want to help, and that is, never to let your help take the form of charity, when you can give it in the form of wages."

"But aunty! How can I always? In a case like this, for instance?"

"I can't answer for always, but in this particular case I think I can. You can get whoever has charge of the garden this summer, or the 'grounds,' I s'pose I ought to say, to give the boy a small stint of work to do after he's had his supper. It will not hurt him a bit, after he's been shut up all day in a stuffy shop, to take off his coat and work out-of-doors for an hour before he goes to bed, and it will keep him out of mischief, too. And as for Lizzy, you can just let her know that Miss Post is her charge for the evening, to be read to or talked to, or have her clothes mended, as the case may be, and she'll be a worse girl than I judge her to be from what we've heard, if she can spend her evenings for a month or two with that dear, good little woman, and not be the better for it!"

"Aunt Sally, you ought to be a general, with a large army under your command, or a stateswoman at the head of a party! With you at my back to explain things to me and for me, I can stand any amount of exhortation from other people!"

"I hope you can, child, for you're in a fair way to get it! I'll explain any thing to you that you want me to, and that I understand myself, but explaining things for you is another part of the speech—that's your affair!"

"You hard-hearted woman! I suppose it is, though. Now you are going to lay your little head down on the back of your chair and take forty winks, while I go and read for half an hour to Miss Post; I haven't seen her all day."

The half hour lengthened to an hour, for Muriel was too full of the new "opportunity" not to talk of it, and Miss Post's ready interest and sympathy led her on; but Aunt Sally, although wide-awake when she returned, did not look as if she felt slighted.

CHAPTER X.

A SMALL BEGINNING.

"A little spark from a high desire
Shall kindle others, and grow a fire.

Enough for us if our lives begin
Successful struggles with grief and sin."

ONE pleasant result to Muriel, of her capture of Aunt Sally, was the frequent intercourse which it brought about with the tribe of Raymond, in which were included not only Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, but Mr. and Mrs. Craig as well, and, to a less extent, but still, as he insisted, just as emphatically, Mrs. Craig's brother, Geoffry Hamilton. Muriel was well satisfied that his visits were about as one in six to those of the other members, for he attracted her least of all. She had an exaggerated prejudice against people who "went in for fashion." It had held her back from intimacy with Kate and Julia Hardcastle, and made her doubtful, at first, about forming a friendship with Mrs. Craig, for Julia Hardcastle had given her a sketch of Fanny before her marriage, and the astonishment which had been caused by the announcement of her engagement to a poor artist, which, if somewhat highly colored, was not exactly untruthful, and which had made Muriel much more reserved to Mrs. Craig than she was to Alice and Marion Raymond, until she had convinced herself that Fanny was "genuine." She did not feel sufficiently interested in Geoffry Hamilton to seek for proofs of his genuineness, and a slight and entirely unconscious stiffness in her manner to him hindered him from

finding her especially attractive—indeed, although he was too polite to tell Aunt Sally so, he rather wondered at her evident fondness for Muriel, while Muriel, in her turn, felt an even greater, but equally silent, surprise at Aunt Sally's regard for him! It had not taken Muriel long to see that, while Fanny was still popular in a decidedly fashionable set, she gave herself no trouble to retain her hold upon it, refusing far more invitations than she accepted, and entertaining only in the simplest and most unostentatious way, and seeming to be entirely careless of criticism from people with whom she was not intimate. Her spontaneous fun and brightness were very charming to Muriel, and had a good effect upon her, and a warm liking for each other was not long in developing between them.

Another acquaintance which was added to her list through Aunt Sally's residence with her, was that of the self-appointed "city missionary," Mr. Duncan. He had called several times, asking only for "Miss Bowne" each time, before Muriel met him, and she had remarked to Aunt Sally that she did not think he was very polite!

Aunt Sally, according to her usual tactics, defended the absent, saying that she supposed Mr. Duncan did not feel at liberty to ask for Miss Douglas unless, or until, he received a formal invitation to call upon her!

"Very well," replied Muriel, "if you really and truly think he is waiting for that, aunty, you can tell him, the next time he comes, that I shall be happy to have him call on me. I suppose you needn't tell him that my reason for being happy will be that I wish to extract some useful information from him, for application to my Row, and especially that house in the middle of it, which is going to be so much too small for all that ought to go in it!"

"For all you'd like to put in it, you mean! It will easily hold the things that are really necessary, and you

must just decide what those things are, and stick to them! And I'll tell Mr. Duncan you'd like to see him; but I will not make any promises for him. He does very little visiting, except of the kind you've heard about, and he may think he hasn't time to be making new acquaintances."

"Now, aunty, you are backing out in a way which is altogether inexcusable! And if you feel so doubtful about Mr. Duncan's honoring me with his acquaintance because I have the misfortune to be rich, you needn't ask him to call on me—I'd rather you wouldn't, now, for I can prime you with the questions I wish him to answer, and he will probably answer them much more fully and satisfactorily to you than he would to me."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if he would," said Aunt Sally, with her usual candor, and Muriel, fancying that she felt a little annoyed by the turn the conversation had taken, changed the subject, which was not again reverted to for several days.

Muriel did not forget her promise to go and have a talk with Miss Prudence Harley, when the mind of the latter should not be distracted by the odor of baking gingerbread.

"You may not think any thing of what I want to tell you—but then again you may!" prefaced Miss Harley, when she had invited Muriel into the little parlor over the shop, leaving intervening doors ajar that she might be able to hear the bell. "I don't know myself," she continued, "whether its worth while or not, but here it is, *such* as it is! Up there, where my sister lives, you know, there used to be a big iron-works, but the man failed, and the place was shut up and left to fall to pieces, and the hands drifted off to other places, most of 'em, though a few settled down in the neighborhood and took up land. The houses that were built for the hands must have been well built, for

a good many of them are standing yet and not so badly out of repair that it would cost much to make them quite fit to be lived in in warm weather, anyhow. I had a notion, two or three years ago, of taking one, so as to be near Jane—she's only a mile out of the village—so I went to look at them and asked all about the rent and the prices of victuals in the neighborhood, and all such questions. I found that the best of them could be had for two dollars a month, and the worst for a dollar. There's a little bit of ground—not much—goes with each house, and they're in a good healthy neighborhood. Victuals, generally speaking, are very cheap; meat for eight cents a pound, eggs for twelve cents a dozen, milk for four or five cents a quart, and all the fruit, for the picking, that any body could want, as I said. Groceries are a little dearer than they are here in the city, which is no wonder, when you look at the road between the village and the nearest railroad station. And flour is quite as dear, anyhow, as it is here, for, for some reason or other, they don't seem to raise any wheat hardly in the neighborhood. But buckwheat's plenty there, and that and rye and Indian meal are a good deal cheaper, and if rye bread's made right, it's good enough for any body, especially when you can have buckwheat cakes and corn-meal cakes and bread to make a variety. Now I suppose you see what I'm driving at, Miss Douglass; if the folks here in the Row, who are not tied fast by the fear of losing their places, would just pick up and go to Hartswell—that's the name of the village—they could live for about half of what it costs them here, and I don't think they'd have any trouble finding work, such as washing and ironing and cooking, by the day, for half the farmers in the valley and the people in the village take summer boarders, and are in hot water about help all the time. And those who had a little money beforehand could do what I'm going to do, put up fruit for the

winter, enough for their own use, anyhow, and enough to sell if they liked. And eggs—there are two or three ways of putting them away so that they'll keep for months, and you know they're often as high as fifty cents a dozen here in the winter and spring."

Muriel had listened with eager interest to all Miss Prudence said, it seemed so exactly to answer her wishes and half-formed plans, but at the conclusion of the description she asked the very natural question :

"And why did you not take one of the houses after all, when you found the rent was so very small and living so cheap ? "

Miss Prudence looked a little foolish as she replied, much less briskly than she usually spoke :

" Well, to tell the truth, after I'd been a week at Jane's I made up my mind that I couldn't stand it for a whole summer, it was so awfully lonesome ! I didn't take the house right at first, for I had a sort of misgiving about it, and thought I'd better wait and see how it went, up there, first. And I concluded that if it seemed as lonesome as the grave in her house, with all her children around, I should go raving mad in a house all by myself, in a place where you could hear a pin drop, and where they didn't so much as drop the pin ! "

" Then how do you think you can stand it this summer ? " asked Muriel, laughing a little at this vivid description of silence that could be felt.

" Oh, I shall only stay two months," said Miss Prudence, " and I shall be so busy all the time, if I do what I've laid out to do, that I'll have no time for moping ! "

I've written down the name and address of the man who is agent for those houses, or was when I was last up there, and I suppose he is yet, and he will be glad enough to answer any questions you may want to ask him

about them if he thinks there is any prospect of renting them."

"Thank you, you are very kind," said Muriel, as she took the slip of paper. "I will write at once, and then see how many of the people could go so far away without losing places which they wish to keep. I wish they could all go, it would be so nice!"

"Perhaps some of 'em don't hanker after the country any more than I do," said Miss Prudence, laughing. "We'll hope so, anyhow!"

And with this philosophical hope Muriel endeavored to console herself as she went home.

She had not failed to keep her appointment with the ragged regiment, and had been much relieved to find that it was not necessary to make an example of any body; they had all scrubbed their hands and faces with a vigor which had brought color into the palest cheeks, and two or three, no doubt with an eye to possible results, had evidently made an attempt upon their hair! Muriel had hoped for a chance to make a beginning, were it ever so small, toward civilizing and enlightening, but, though she rated herself soundly, afterward, for cowardice, she could not summon courage to do any thing more than offer a similar appointment for the ensuing week, which offer was hilariously accepted by the whole group, which this time contained a dozen.

Aunt Sally had made one or two suggestions which Muriel had thought very good when she heard them, but, in the face of the unabashed, hardened-looking little creatures who gathered about her, all her ideas fled, save that of keeping the slight hold upon them which she had already obtained.

"There's more fellers wants to come. I had to lick two to keep 'em from coming to-day," announced the youth of voluminous trowsers.

"You did it, may be, but you didn't have to!" said Mu-

riel, with as much gravity and severity as she could muster. "That's no way to make people do what you wish!" she added.

"'Deed then, its the only way, lady!" he answered, grinning up in her face as he spoke. "There's nothing else they mind but a real good, solid licking!"

"But you wouldn't like any body to treat *you* that way; you don't think it is the best way to make *you* mind!" she pursued, sure of her advantage, this time.

"It's the *only* way, I tell you," he repeated, "whether its me or him," punching his nearest neighbor in the back, as he spoke, "or any of the boys. They fotched me up that way, and see the fine boy I am!"

It was impossible to tell whether he was in earnest or not. His face had grown suddenly grave, but he winked audaciously at her as he spoke. Then, returning to his "last remark but one," he inquired:

"Shall I let those other fellers come next time? There's four of them, but when I'd licked the two, the other two said they didn't care nothing about coming and never had!"

Muriel thought a moment. Of what use was it? Then she remembered Aunt Sally's encouragement—it was better than nothing, it might be a beginning of better things, to teach them to be clean. And, next time, she might see her way to something more.

"Yes," she said, "you must let them come. Only remember all the hands and faces must be *perfectly* clean! And I shall have something for each of you besides the cake and stick of candy," she added, with a sudden inspiration. "Not any thing to eat, but something to keep. Now I must go. Good-by."

With a deafening war-whoop, and a chorus of "Thank you, lady, thank you!" the motley crowd dispersed, but the

champion followed her with: "Say! Just tell me what the game is, lady! I'll not give you away!"

"You'd not believe me if I were to tell you," said Muriel, feeling quite free from embarrassment, now that she had only one to deal with.

"Yes, I would," he said, presently, "without it was something awful steep. I'd believe you, because you kep' your word about meetin' us again. I didn't much think you would, neither!"

"Then what made you wash your face and hands, and come to the place?" asked Muriel, briskly.

"Well, it wasn't so much of a job, but what it was worth while to risk it, or I thought it wasn't 'till I'd begun on it!" he replied. "But come on, I'll not peach. What is it you're arter, anyway?"

"Look right at me!" said Muriel, wheeling round and fixing her eyes on his. "I want to help you all to behave better—to stop being dirty, and mean, and using bad words, and telling lies, and 'licking' each other. I want to help you to grow up into decent men and women. Do you understand me?"

"Oh, yes!" and he winked again. "It's the same as tracks, and Sunday-school, arter all! I thought so!" and he chuckled over his own penetration. "But it's not exactly the same, neither!" he added, with cheerful patronage. "They don't give you nothing to eat, them Sunday-school ones, and they talk you tired into the bargain! So long as you don't do nothing worse than make us wash our hands and faces, and the cake and candy's as prime as it was to-day, we'll come, you may bet your sweet life on that! And I promise you, solemn, I'll lick the first one of 'em that tries any impudence on you, for you're not half a bad sort!"

He scuttled down an alley they were passing, and she

saw him no more. But one resolve she instantly made. She would find a room before her next meeting with them, and do something to arouse their attention, and secure their coming again. And she thought, with no little vexation, how useful Mr. Duncan might be at this crisis, if she might only have a frank talk with him, and get his advice. She felt a good deal like the fisherman who had uncorked the bottle containing the imprisoned *geni*, but, unlike that astute individual, she knew of no way by which she might bottle the imps whom she had evoked. So she decided to swallow her pride, which rebelled at the idea, and "prime" Aunt Sally, as she had threatened to do, with questions for Mr. Duncan; she would go and see Mr. Dwight, too, and no doubt he both could and would help her. As for the room, Miss Harley could probably suggest one, for it had struck Muriel that there was very little about the neighborhood and the people which she did not know. Yet it did not seem as if she had gathered her information from an ordinary love of gossip, but rather that it might afford her suggestions for helping and serving her neighbors.

Muriel had been walking slowly toward the street where she expected to take a car, as she thought, but she was still in the region of courts and alleys, when it occurred to her that it was not yet too late, if she should hurry, to go back to Miss Harley and inquire about the room; then, if she knew of none, it would give her more time to think of possibilities and make suggestions.

Muriel hastily pulled out her watch, without noticing that a "man all tattered and torn" and with a most repulsive face, was skulking along the pavement a few steps behind her, watching her furtively as he shambled along. The moment he saw the watch, he sprang to her side, gave a dexterous thrust to the chain, which instantly released it, with one hand, while at the same time he held the other

over her mouth. The whole thing was so sudden, and so utterly unexpected, that she could not have cried out, even had he not thus hindered her from doing so, and the street, just then, was entirely empty, for it is a well-ascertained fact that no policeman was ever known to be within sight or hearing at such a time. The ragamuffin, however, was destined to prove the truth of an old adage, for before he could make off with his booty, he was "mercilessly collared from behind," with a pressure of knuckles on his throat, which produced a smothered howl, while a stern voice said :

"Give me that watch !"

He held it out abjectly, saying in hoarse tones, which he tried to make supplicating :

"Let me go, boss—just this once, it's the first time, I'll swear it is ! And I was starving !"

Muriel began to recover from her paralysis of fright, and looked up. She never forgot the picture she saw. A tall, straight young fellow, with broad shoulders, long arms, and a look of splendid health and strength about him, held in his strong grasp a man so brutalized by drink, and dishonesty, and every mean vice, that it did not seem possible they could belong to the same species. Her rescuer's hat had fallen off, revealing a shock of waving yellow hair, which stood up, on the top of his head, in a manner suggestive of a mane. Large, fiery-looking blue eyes, set deep in their sockets, drew attention from the fact that the other features, though strongly marked, were not at all regular. It was, altogether, a striking-looking face, not easily to be forgotten, and Muriel, as soon as she saw it, knew, from various things she had heard Aunt Sally say, and from the neighborhood in which she had met him, that this must be Neil Duncan.

"You will excuse me, madame" he said, as he gave her her watch with his disengaged hand—as if one were quite

"A tall, straight young fellow held in his strong grasp a man so brutalized by drink, dishonesty, and every mean vice, that it did not seem possible they could belong to the same species." P. 204.

sufficient to hold the thief—"if I advise you to leave this neighborhood as soon as possible and not to come to it again unattended, unless—" and he hesitated, as if fearful of giving offense—"unless you can leave at home any thing which might prove a temptation to dishonest people—No you don't!"

For the man, with a sudden wrench and squirm, had almost succeeded in twisting himself out of his coat, and making off.

"I never thought," gasped Muriel. "I didn't care so much—for the watch—but he had his horrible hand all over my face!"

"It could not have been pleasant," responded Mr. Duncan, "but—oh, there is a policeman at last, and only a half a block away!"

He gave a loud, shrill whistle, which at once attracted the officer's attention, and brought him to the spot, and the man, whining and protesting, was handed over to him. Mr. Duncan gave his name and address, engaging to appear against the thief whenever he should be needed, and then, seeing a look of apprehension on Muriel's face, he hastened to reassure her with:

"You will not be called upon in any way. I saw the whole affair, and my testimony will be ample. And now," he added, "that that rogue is disposed of, you will allow me, at least, to put you in a car before I leave you? If I am not mistaken, you are Miss Douglas?"

"I am, and you are Mr. Duncan?"

"Yes, I was about to mention my name, hoping that you might have heard Miss Bowne speak of me, but, of course, you heard it when I gave it to the policeman just now. That fellow has been 'wanted' for weeks, but he has been too sharp for them till to-day."

"Where were you when it happened? I did not see any

one, anywhere, until you dropped, so far as I could ascertain, from the nearest housetop ! "

"I did—in a sense. I had just come from the garret of the corner-house, and was at the door when that scamp grabbed your watch. But indeed, if you will excuse me for saying so, you offered him every inducement. Even if you had not just taken it in your hand, he would have had no difficulty in snatching it ; I wonder more of that business is not done, when it is made so very easy for such gentry."

"I never thought," said Muriel, deprecatingly, almost apologetically, "and I neither saw nor heard the man, until he had the watch in his hand. I will be more careful after this—indeed, I will."

The gentleness and humility with which she spoke made him realize that his own tone had been somewhat dictatorial ; he could not, of course, know that the long course of reproof and repression under which she had grown up had not yet lost its effect upon her ; that she still felt as if she were in fault, when any body, as Margery would have said, "faulted" her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a little confusion. "I was not thinking what I was saying. I am altogether too much given to offering my valuable advice 'free gracious,'" and he tried to dismiss the matter with a laugh, but Muriel answered frankly :

"You are quite right to tell me, and I am much obliged to you. But I ought to have thought of it myself, without any telling. My only consolation is, that it was an old offender, and one who quite deserves punishment, who will suffer for my carelessness. But that," she added thoughtfully, "does not exculpate me."

He looked down at her curiously. It was certainly something novel, for the victim of a thief to take blame to her-

self for having put temptation in his way! They were standing at the corner, now, waiting for the car which was discernible in the distance.

"I have only just remembered what made me look at my watch!" exclaimed Muriel; "I wanted to see if I had time to go back and speak to Miss Harley—she keeps a little shop a few blocks away from here—I would need but a few minutes, and it will not be dark for more than an hour. You think I would be safe, now, do you not?"

"No," he said, decidedly, "I do not. It is later than you think; the sun will set in a very few minutes, and even if you were to walk rapidly, and not stop more than five minutes, you would not be out of this region before dusk. I know where Miss Harley's shop is, quite well—it is, let me see—six blocks from where we are standing."

She looked so genuinely disappointed, and yet so instantly submissive, that he felt sorry for her, and added, though with a rather too manifest reluctance:

"If it is important that you should see her this evening, I will go back with you. I have nothing to do just now, I assure you, and the walk is not worth considering."

"Would you really not mind?" she said, doubtfully; "I *did* wish very much to speak to Miss Harley. I can say all I wish to say in five minutes, and if you will just put me in the car afterward I shall be all safe, and so very much obliged to you!"

Her perfect simplicity and candor disarmed him. And, without, perhaps, being aware of it, he was gratified by the version of himself, which Miss Bowne must, evidently, have given her. She had, from the first, shown entire confidence not only in his courtesy, but in his judgment as well, and who could be proof against a tribute at once so unconscious and so flattering?

"I assure you," he said, far more cordially than he had

yet spoken, "that it will not inconvenience me in the least to go back with you and wait your pleasure. Come, we are losing time."

And he turned, pausing a moment for her to follow. They walked briskly, and as he did not speak, neither did Muriel, until they reached Miss Harley's shop. Then he said:

"I will wait here for you—pray do not feel hurried. There is plenty of time."

She went into the shop, the door of which stood open, for it was one of those days of sudden warmth which sometimes come in early spring, and which seem so much warmer than any of the summer days which follow. He changed his position, so that he could see, without hearing her, and then quietly waited. Miss Harley was sitting in a low rocking-chair in front of the counter, but she arose as Muriel entered, with apparent surprise, and drew forward her chair, evidently urging Miss Douglas to sit down. But Muriel continued standing, and the five minutes for which she had stipulated had not quite elapsed, when she held out her hand to Miss Harley, and turned to the door.

"I am afraid you did not give yourself sufficient time," said Mr. Duncan, as she joined him; "you certainly did not take more than three minutes, and you know you requested five!"

"I should have needed quite five," she replied, smiling, but not, he thought, very cheerfully, "if I had been successful, but I was not."

"I am sorry to hear it," he said, politely, but with no especial interest in tone or manner.

"Miss Harley said," and Muriel hesitated a little before she went on, "that you could probably tell me what I wished to know. I dislike very much to trouble you, but it is just to answer a question. I was looking for a vacant

room—it need not be very large—somewhere in this neighborhood. A room on the ground floor would be best, and I would rather it should be in some place that is not occupied by people, but I don't suppose I can find that, so I would take one any where, if the people in the house were respectable. And Miss Harley said she thought you would know if I had any chance of finding one."

It was impossible not to see that he looked annoyed. They had once more reached the corner where they must wait for a car, and were standing under a gaslight. Muriel was about to add a hurried protest that it was no matter; that some one else could probably tell her what she wished to know, when he prevented her by saying:

"I do know of such a room as you wish, I think, but I am not sure that it would be rented to you. You may have noticed a warehouse just behind the row of houses in which Miss Harley lives? The upper part of it is used for storage, but the ground-floor was at one time fitted up as a sort of chapel, and it is vacant. It is quite large, but I think the owner would be willing to put up a partition, if it were made worth his while to do so. I have a slight and accidental acquaintance with him. I thought I saw a light in the lower windows, late one night, through the cracks of the shutters, and hunted up a policeman, thinking only of fire, but we found that a gang of boys had managed to effect an entrance and were using the room regularly, regarding it as a sort of robbers' cave! They had counted on the long disuse of the room, as a sort of guaranty for their security. Of course, they were arrested, and the room made secure, but the owner had an exaggerated sense of his obligation to me, and managed to find me out, and I meet him quite frequently on the street. He would wish to know exactly to what use the room was to be put, but as to that, you could, of course, I suppose, satisfy him?"

"No, I am afraid I could not," replied Muriel, in troubled tones, "for I do not quite know myself!"

Before she could say any thing further, the car stopped, and when it started again Mr. Duncan was sitting beside her.

"Indeed," she said earnestly, "it is not at all necessary for you to go all the way home with me! I have only a very little way way to walk, after I leave the car, and I am not at all afraid—pray do not give yourself so much trouble!"

"I am not giving myself any trouble, I assure you," he said, "but quite the contrary! Do you know Miss Bowne so slightly that you think she would hesitate, the next time we meet, to tell me what she thought of me for leaving you before I saw you safely on your own doorstep?"

It was impossible to help smiling at the picture conjured up by these words. Short as Muriel's friendship with Aunt Sally had been, she had witnessed one or two of the attacks of righteous indignation of which, it was evident, Mr. Duncan had also some knowledge, and she could readily imagine that, when she came to relate her experience, it would be even as he suggested, should he fail to make sure of her safe arrival at home.

"Besides," Mr. Duncan hastened to add, "I will confess to a feeling of curiosity concerning the room you wish to rent, and an inability to fathom your motive for renting it, if you do not know exactly what you wish to do with it."

"Nothing would please me more than to tell you about it, if you would care to hear," said Muriel, with sudden animation, "for I do not know of any body who could so well tell me what I had better do as you can."

And forthwith she told about her experiment with the candy, and the two subsequent appointments.

"And I really don't know what to do with them next

time!" she concluded. "I can't just keep on bribing them to wash their hands and faces."

"No," he said seriously, "it would hardly be worth while to rent a room just for that, if it is going to lead to nothing else. But it will, I think. I will speak to Mr. Sellers, or his agent, about the room in the warehouse. I think he will let you have it, and it would not matter that it is too large. I have an idea that this enterprise of yours will grow. I think, the next time you meet them, if you have secured the room, I would take them to it and give them some music, have somebody there who can sing them some good stirring tunes. And begin quietly to collect their names. You will have to be cautious about that though, or they will think you have some evil design upon them; they are very suspicious. But you will find, I think, that music will give you a great hold on them, and it is wonderful how quickly they will catch up a tune. But you must be prepared to find it very slow work and to meet with numberless discouragements. Just think—though you can't fully realize them—of the places they come from!"

He was talking freely and animatedly now, and Muriel was sincerely sorry when the end of her journey was reached. He saw her safely upon her doorstep, as he had implied that he would, but declined her invitation to enter and see Miss Bowne.

"I shall come to see her very soon, though," he said, holding out his hand as he spoke, "and you will permit me, will you not, to see you at the same time?"

"I shall be very glad to," she said, frankly; "you have told me so much and so little, that I want to hear more!"

Aunt Sally had grown decidedly uneasy as the time of Muriel's absence lengthened, and listened to the story of her adventures with flattering attention, but the inference she drew annoyed Muriel not a little.

"You mustn't go there alone any more, my dear," she said; "if it happens that I can't go with you, you must take Margery or Dick. He looks strong. I don't think that wretch would have attacked you to-night if he'd been with you, and it will be good for him, too. I wish I'd thought of it sooner."

"But aunty," said Muriel, "I don't like to ask him——"

"You needn't!" interrupted Aunt Sally, briskly, "I'll do it myself!"

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY.

"It is only the first step that costs."

MURIEL'S friendship with Dick had not stopped at the beginning. He spent a good deal of his spare time with her, now, and his interest in all her projects and visions was so fresh and genuine, that she found herself talking more freely to him than to any one else, save Aunt Sally. He often made suggestions which pleased her, both by their originality and sensibleness, and, after Aunt Sally's *dictum* as to taking him for a cavalier had been made known to him, and he had accepted the position with much pleasure and no little pride, it occurred to Muriel that he would be an invaluable helper with her "mob," and she asked him, in flattering terms, at least to attend the first meeting. He was a little shy about it, until he found that she felt a slight fear of some demonstration which would need something more than moral suasion to quell it ; this idea was quite sufficient to make him ready and willing to go, and as, fortunately, the time appointed was Saturday afternoon, there would be nothing to hinder him.

When Mr. Duncan called to say that he had obtained the refusal of the room for her, her pleasure at his success was at least three-quarters consternation ; a fact which was so plainly written on her face, that he felt both amused and curious to see how she would manage with this elephant which she had taken on her hands. He saw her glance at

him once or twice in a questioning manner, but she did not put her question into words, and left most of the talking to Aunt Sally. He had no intention of offering to assist her with her enterprise, for his time was fully occupied already, and he had an idea, founded upon one or two unpleasant and memorable experiences, that, should he do so, the elephant would be skillfully transferred to his keeping. So, although he answered the few timid questions which she managed to ask him both kindly and fully, he did no more, and, without a word from either of them which suggested such an understanding, she was made very fully to understand that she would be wise should she ask only for information.

"And all I wanted," she wrote, after this interview was over, "was to have him offer to come the first time and show me how to begin! He can sing—Dick says he sings beautifully—and if he would come, just this first time, and sing for them and talk a little to them, I think I could manage after that, with other people to help me once in a while—Dick and Aunt Sally, and May and Miss Forsythe, and perhaps Julia. She is so entertaining and talks so well, that she could be a great help if she liked. But one thing is certain, I must not ask Mr. Duncan for even the smallest help, and I will only ask instruction from him when I can not possibly find out what I wish to know from any one else. I am sorry. He might have helped me so much, with so little trouble to himself, and I should not have presumed, as he is evidently afraid I should. I must be even more disagreeable than I thought I was!"

It was to no one but herself that Muriel wrote this; she had formed a habit, many years before, of "writing herself out," instead of talking to any one; she had happened to mention this to May, and the latter had been so much amused with the idea that Muriel had felt called upon to defend it.

"Oh 'you may laugh,' as Aunt Sally says," she said, "but it is a most excellent plan! You well-balanced people, who never boil over, no matter how hot the fire is, or who think you don't—for I contend that you do, in ways which are quite imperceptible to yourselves—can not understand how we ill-balanced ones feel as if we must say things! So one day, years and years ago, when I wanted most dreadfully to 'talk back' to grandpapa, and yet was afraid to, I tried this plan. I wrote a long letter, saying every thing I could think of to an imaginary correspondent in whom I had entire confidence, and I really felt almost as much better as I should have done if I had said it! And the pleasure is a double one. I don't know whether you ever really told a confidence to any one. I did, just once, and I repented in dust and ashes in about a week. So you keep your letter until that time comes, and it's sure to come! And then you have the pure pleasure of burning it, and that is worth the whole cost of the proceeding!"

The time for burning the above-mentioned complaint came in less than a week, for she happened to hear of some of the work which Mr. Duncan had on hand, and felt ashamed of her annoyance with him, and Dick solved her problem in a most satisfactory way. He had belonged to a small glee-club, until the cracked condition of his changing voice had obliged him to content himself for awhile with the part of a listener, and he was on very friendly terms with the eight or ten other members, so that when Muriel told him of Mr. Duncan's suggestion about singing, and lamented her inability to carry it out, he thought at once of an arrangement which he could probably make without any difficulty, but with his usual common sense said nothing about it until he should be able to speak with certainty.

"Why don't you sing to them yourself, Miss Muriel?" he asked, instead.

"I? Why, I never took a lesson in my life! The little warbles in which you have occasionally heard me indulge about the house, would not avail me for a moment, if I were facing my 'mob!' *Why* did you let your voice go all to pieces just now Dick, instead of waiting only a few weeks longer?"

"I'm very sorry; it wasn't intentional! And I am sure you could sing to them, if you would only believe it. Miss Muriel! if you're going to be the leader of mobs, by profession, don't you think it would be a good plan to take enough singing-lessons just to be able to stand up and sing with, or to them, and not faint afterward?"

"I never fainted in the whole twenty years of my conscious existence, as you might know merely by looking at me, you disrespectful boy! But I do believe it would be a good plan to take singing-lessons. It's quite true that 'music hath charms to soothe the savage breast.' I'll do it, and I'm much obliged to you for the suggestion."

"Don't mention it! And to think, if my voice were not like that of a buzz-saw, how we might have practiced duets together!"

"Do not mourn! It will be some months, perhaps years, before I arrive at that stage, and may be by that time your voice will have returned to you, or another one, even better than the dear departed, may have come in its place."

They were busy in the "kitchen garden" when this talk took place, for Dick had fulfilled his engagement concerning it, and Margery remarked dryly, that she had seen a farm planted with less palaver than it took to settle what should go in a place the size of a tablecloth!

"Now Margery!" said Dick, shutting one eye, as he spoke, to see if he had his line straight, "you're only saying that to disguise your own deep interest in the matter! You see, if we had thirty or forty acres, there would be room for every

thing, and we should not be obliged to pick and choose, but with a place the size of a floorcloth, if you like, for I'll not submit to the tablecloth, we can't have every thing, and the decision is difficult ! "

" It's so very important what you have ! " and Margery returned to the house, smiling to herself as she thought of her " bairn's " bright color, and happy, animated face.

" That's none such a bad boy, *for* a boy," she thought, " and I'll own I'm thankful to him for taking her out of this dour house ! "

But the house was beginning to seem a great deal less " dour," even to Margery. The little maid who was to wait upon Miss Post had come, and, although she was very quiet, her sturdy figure and fair, blue-eyed face, with its crown of tightly-braided flaxen hair seemed somehow to make a difference. When Margery was consulted as to where this small person should sleep, she astonished Muriel by suggesting that a small single bedstead, which was not in use, could be put up in the corner of her, Margery's, own room !

" But I'm afraid she will disturb you," said Muriel ; " we know so little about her, and she may be untidy and do things that will annoy you."

" I'll risk that," said Margery, briefly.

" I saw the child," she added, " the day her aunt brought her here to speak to you, and I am much mistaken, which I am not often, if she has not been well taught and trained. It was raining, you'll mind, and she held up the point of her wet umbrella that it might not drip on the kitchen-floor while she asked me where she should put it ! There's not many children of her age would have thought to do that ! "

Muriel laughed heartily.

" Oh Margery ! " she exclaimed, " I am quite sure you must be a lineal descendant of the old woman who tested the princess with the three pease ! "

"And if I am I'm not aware of it, for I never so much as heard of her!"

So Muriel briefly related how the old woman, doubting the truthfulness of the wandering princess's claim to royalty, placed the pease under fifteen mattresses and fifteen feather-beds, upon which she put the supposititious princess to sleep, and how, when the latter came down pale and haggard in the morning and said she had been unable to sleep, because of three great lumps in her bed, the old woman admitted her claim without further parley!

"That's foolishness, of course," said Margery, "but there's a streak of sense in it, for all. And as for the little girl, she'd be lonesome may be, alone in a strange room, and that would make her discontented, so she'll be best with me, and then I can look after her clothes and see that she keeps herself clean and neat!"

Muriel felt a little compassion for the small Scotchwoman, but she did not express it, and, as the event proved, it was not needed. The child was as well-taught as Margery had surmised, and gave no trouble in any way. Her low, soft voice and gentle manner of moving and speaking made Miss Post "take to" her at once, and it was not long before these two felt a real affection for each other. She had said, when Muriel asked her name:

"It is Mary Macdonald, ma'am, but I've always been called Maidie."

"And would you rather be called Maidie still?" inquired Muriel.

"If you'd just as soon, ma'am—but it makes no matter," she hastened to add.

So she was still called by her home-name, even Margery, for a wonder, having nothing to say about "foolishness."

Muriel had no desire to worry Aunt Sally with her apprehensions concerning her engagement with the "mob,"

but she could not entirely conceal the anxiety which she felt as the day approached, for the room was engaged for a term of six months, and she had not yet decided what the "exercises" were to be. She had been so strenuously warned, by Mr. Duncan especially, but also by Mr. Dwight and Miss Harley, against indiscriminate giving that she felt afraid to provide any thing beyond the promised cake and stick of candy for each one. But as her friend of the trowsers had suggested that four more "fellers" would like to come, and she had given free permission, others might be added in the interval, so she armed herself with refreshments sufficient for two dozen.

"And if more should come, said Dick, encouragingly, "I can cut out and get you enough to finish them up at Miss Harley's—it'll be her baking-day, you know."

He was not able to conclude the arrangement for which he had been negotiating until Friday afternoon. Then he came to her in triumph, with :

"It's all right, Miss Muriel ! There's two of the fellows in our glee club—Jim Burnham and Charley Armitage—who say they'll be proud and happy to come and sing for you to-morrow afternoon. And they *can* sing, I can tell you—Jim's a tenor, and Charley's a bass—and they think it will be a regular lark ! "

"Oh Dick," exclaimed Muriel, almost crying with the sudden relief his words brought her, "Will they really do it, and not think it a trouble ? How lovely ! How kind you were to see about it."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Dick, who always shrank from praise, "but I couldn't stand it to see you so worried, Miss Muriel, and I just told those two fellows all about it, and how indignant you were with me for having cracked my voice, and I didn't even have to ask them, they really offered to come and sing whatever you liked best, 'from

"Old Hundred" to "My Grandfather's Clock,"' Jim said; but he didn't put it as a message to you, it was just a remark."

Muriel laughed at this profound joke, in the lightness of her heart, in a way which it did Dick good to hear. Then she said, struck by a sudden thought:

"Do they live very far from here, Dick—your two kind friends?"

"Why no, not very—somewhere about half-way between here and the flat."

"And do you think, if they have no engagement, they would mind coming here this evening, and having a little talk with Aunt Sally and me about what we'd better do?"

"I don't believe they would—very much. To tell the truth, Miss Muriel, I thought you'd want to coach them a little, and so did they, and they're to meet me at the drug-store just below here, at eight o'clock; they said if you had indicated to me in any way that you didn't wish to see them, they should insist upon my treating them to soda-water, and I said I would."

"Oh Dick! How can I ever thank you enough? You have thought of every thing. Must you go? It's such a long walk to take twice over in one evening. Why can't you just stay and have dinner with me, or supper with Aunt Sally, according to your 'previous condition'? Do!"

"Thank you, I shall be most happy! Now, Miss Muriel, will you give me your solemn assurance that I didn't fish for that invitation?"

"Why, of course, you didn't! What put such an absurd idea into your head?"

"Oh, well, when I was coming away this afternoon, I had told the girls about the whole business—and they're as interested as can be, by the way, and very anxious to hear how it turns out—and I said that if you really insisted upon

it, I might stop to tea, or dinner, or whatever you call your evening meal, with you, so they need not be alarmed if I did not appear at seven, and Marion said that of course, if I went in that frame of mind, I should fish for an invitation; then she got out of it by adding, 'not consciously, perhaps, but you'll do it ail the same!' And so I wanted you to enable me to confound her."

"She deserves to be confounded! You didn't say the *least thing* like it, and I shall tell her so the first time I see her. Now you must excuse me for a few minutes, while I go call Aunt Sally, and tell Rogers you are going to stay; he will feel deeply injured if I don't."

And as it was, Rogers said rather anxiously, "I wish I'd knowed about it in time to tell cook to have a little extra soup, Miss Muriel! A young man of Mr. Richard's age is apt to eat pretty hearty, but she can broil three or four more chops, and that will make up, and would you think favorable of some ice-cream for dessert? You know there's nothing but fruit ordered."

"Why yes," replied Muriel—as she would have replied to almost any suggestion made in that tone by her major-domo. "I think that would be very nice—here's the money, and if you're busy ask Ann to go. And, Rogers, you just give me a very little soup, and then there will be enough, and I think, after this—but I'll speak to Betsy myself to-morrow."

Rogers bestirred himself to put the extra touches on the table, which it was his delight to give whenever he had the excuse of "company," and when Dick, with Aunt Sally hugged up to him on one arm, and Muriel decorously "taking" the other, came into the brightly-lighted dining-room, he exclaimed involuntarily:

"How jolly!"

"I don't know," replied Muriel, "it's so much too large,

Dick. If it were not for the fuss it would make, I should have a partition run across the middle, but the screen is better than nothing, and next winter I shall cut off the lower half with a nice thick curtain."

"It's queer," said Dick, "how it all depends on 'the point of view;' it's just because it *is* large, that I like it; though I don't suppose I should, if it were not so pretty, too."

Muriel could not long refrain from telling Aunt Sally about Dick's arrangement with his friends, and the old lady looked at "her boy" with tender pride, but all she said was:

"That was like your father, Dick. You're growing more like him all the time."

There was an animated discussion as to what songs had better be sung to the mob, and they lingered so long over the dinner-table, that Dick, glancing at the mantle-clock, begged to be excused that he might "go after the boys." He came back with them in less than half an hour, and introduced them with due gravity.

"Miss Bowne, Miss Douglas, allow me to present my friends, Mr. Burnham and Mr. Armitage."

They had such nice, frank, boyish faces, that Muriel felt quite at her ease with them, and said gratefully, as she held out her hand:

"It is so very good of you to allow yourselves to be presented, under the circumstances, that I don't know how to thank you."

"I am very glad you don't, Miss Douglas,' replied Mr. Burnham; "it's so dreadfully embarrassing to be thanked. And we feel like conspirators, anyhow, our motive is so utterly base."

"Please speak for yourself," exclaimed Mr. Armitage. "I confess that I am anticipating a lark, if you will excuse

the expression, Miss Douglas, but it is the first time I ever anticipated a philanthropic lark, and I am conscious of being on a higher moral plane than usual."

They were evidently two or three years older than Dick, though neither of them was so tall as he was, but it was quite as evident that they had not yet begun to consider themselves experienced men of the world, and Aunt Sally and Muriel exchanged pleased glances as the two boys entered with interest upon the arrangement of the programme, as they insisted upon calling it, although Muriel said that name was much too alarming.

"I am to meet my mob at five o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and the rendezvous is only a few blocks from the 'hall,' so I think, if you will be there at four, I will send Dick on to meet you, and I will presently appear, conducting the mob."

"You don't think you'd better let one of us go with you to meet the mob?" suggested Mr. Burnham, doubtfully.

"No, thank you," replied Muriel, "Dick will walk with me to the trysting place, and see that there are no highwaymen about, and Miss Harley, a friend of mine who lives in the end house of the row just in front of the warehouse, has promised to station a policeman where he can look on, without being suspiciously near. You see, I have been warned that these Arabs are very distrustful, and indeed, I was accused, at the very outset, of giving candy merely because I wished to follow it up with a 'track,' so I do not mean to do any thing which will arouse their suspicions. I think I have one friend among them, and I am counting on his influence—perhaps unduly."

And she described her champion, and told of her conversation with him, to the great amusement of the boys.

"He's not so far out of the way in his views on 'licking,'

I'm afraid," said Charley Armitage, "but I hope he will not feel called upon to mar the harmony of the occasion by exhibiting his prowess to-morrow."

"Indeed, I hope he will not!" replied Muriel, so earnestly that they all laughed, and Dick assured her that he would protect her.

"The girls somehow afflict me more than the boys do," said Muriel. "I wonder if a bad girl really is any worse than an equally bad boy? She always seems so. I tried to fancy any of those dreadful little creatures playing with a doll, or sewing, but I couldn't do it—and I heard one of them swear like a trooper."

"And yet you'd find, if you offered any of 'em a doll, that you'd misjudged them," said Aunt Sally, "and if I were you, Muriel, that's just how I'd begin—take half the room for the girls, and lend them dolls to play with, only you'll have to see that they have the same ones every time, and after a little you can begin to teach them to sew for the dolls."

"I might try," she answered, doubtfully, "and I wish I could think of something to start the boys with—some sort of work that would seem like play. Can you think of any thing?" And she turned to the three boys present, who were listening with amused interest.

"How would it do to have knives, and hammers, and nails, and a lot of lumber for them?" inquired Jim Burnham, with sudden animation.

"I think it would be a very good plan," replied Muriel, gratefully. "It was stupid in me not to think of it, but I know so little about boys."

"You'll know all you want to by to-morrow evening, I reckon," said Aunt Sally, "but you're settling for every thing *but* to-morrow, and I thought it was that you were so anxious about?"

They all laughed at this gentle reminder, but Jim Burnham said at once :

"What had you thought about the songs, Miss Douglas? Were there any in particular that you wished?"

"It seemed to me," replied Muriel, "that if we could find something with an air that was easy to catch, and a chorus, and tell them to join in as soon as they could, it would fix their attention. I suppose there are very few of them who can not turn a tune? There's an old war song that came into my head to-day. My father was in the army during the war, and I found this song put away with some books and music of my mother's only the other day, and my cousin played and sang it for me. It is called 'Marching Through Georgia'—have you ever heard it?"

"We know it quite well," replied Jim. "One of us happened to hear it, and got it for the club to learn, on account of the chorus—there's a real ring in it. And we know some negro songs, with choruses, that have simple tunes—how would they do?"

"Capitally, I should think," said Muriel. "We need not make the session very long—indeed, I was advised not to—so I think two or three songs would be enough, with the cake and candy act."

"And your speech!" put in Dick, mischievously.

"And my speech! Thank you. Besides, I was not able, at such short notice, to have any benches put in the hall, and it will not do to keep the poor little sinners long, when we can not even ask them to sit down. But I hope to have the benches by next week; be sure you don't forget to speak to that carpenter to-morrow, please, Dick."

"I will not. And, Miss Muriel, if you'd like to have the benches for to-morrow, very much I might rush round in the morning, and see what I could do about hiring some."

"Oh, no; thank you; you are doing quite enough! And

they can sit on the floor if they get very tired; I don't believe it will be a novel experience to any of them to do that, judging from some of the 'interiors' I have seen lately, in passing."

"Aunt Sally," said Dick, suddenly, "Miss Muriel admits that she has a small gift for each member of the mob, but I can not induce her to tell me what it is. Do you know?"

"Yes," replied Aunt Sally, "I know, and I don't see why she should be ashamed of it."

"You see," said Muriel, laughing, but flushing a little at the same time, "I saw that several of them, in addition to washing their hands and faces, had evidently made an attempt to mitigate their hair, although it looked as if the attempt had been made with the traditionary 'three-legged stool,' and as I didn't dare to buy them any thing worth while, in the face of all the solemn warnings I have received, I am going to give them these."

She brought out a parcel from the under part of the nearest book-case—for they were sitting in the library—and revealed to their gaze several dozen pocket-combs.

The boys laughed, of course, but Dick immediately said:

"That's a very good idea, Miss Muriel. I can remember distinctly, the winter we went to the district school at Dovedale, sitting next to, and envying, a boy who had a pocket-comb, which he used with needless ostentation!"

"But you'll have to explain what they are for, Miss Douglas," said Jim, "and if you like, I will take Dick or Charley and give an example while you're doing it!"

"Thank you," said Muriel, laughing. "You are very kind, but I will not trespass on your kindness to so large an extent."

"Miss Douglas will be quite unfitted for the mental strain which is before her, if we stay any longer," said Jim, rising as he spoke. "Good-night, Miss Douglas. I wonder if

you will let us come to see you sometimes, quite independently of the mob?"

"I will, with a great deal of pleasure," she answered, cordially, and then there was a general hand-shaking, and the three boys went, but Dick pulled Aunt Sally behind the door and kissed her audibly, to the great edification of his comrades.

"I'd like to know the fathers and mothers of those two boys," she said, as soon as they were out of hearing. "What nice, frank, manly fellows they seem to be! I've often heard Dick speak of them, and wished he would bring them home with him, but he's always been queer about that. I don't think he's ever felt at home for a minute, there at the flat, and he never seemed to want to bring any of his friends there. The girls felt the change from the large house at Dovedale, too, of course, but I really don't think any of them have minded it as much as he has; he does love the farm."

"I like to see him work in the garden," said Muriel; "he is so good and strong, and the tools all seem to go exactly where he means them to. Now, when I try to hoe, I am always surprising myself by seeing where the hoe comes down."

"You've not had quite as much practice as he has. He's been at it ever since he could run alone. I can see him now, trotting about after his father, all over the farm, and trying to do every thing he saw the men do. But come, my dear, it's quite true that you ought to have plenty of sleep to-night, and if you're going to read Miss Post her chapter, it's high time you were going."

"I am so glad to find that Maidie can read aloud respectably," said Muriel, as she obediently rose to follow Aunt Sally. "Miss Post does not mind her Scotch accent at all; she says it is pretty. And the child seems delighted

to have the opportunity. I'm so very glad you knew about her and told me, aunty. I hope 'Lizzy' will not put any mischief into her head."

"They'll not need to be together at all, except when Miss Post is by," said Aunt Sally, over her shoulder, "so I wouldn't do any trouble-borrowing there, child."

"Do you know of any place where you would do it, dear?" asked Muriel; and Aunt Sally replied with her usual candor:

"Well, no; I can't say that I do."

This cheery declaration, and the unexpected help which Dick had brought, sent Muriel to bed in good spirits, but she did not feel quite so sanguine the next morning, and had a cowardly wish that Aunt Sally would offer to go with her in the afternoon. But this the old lady refrained from doing, because she thought Muriel would get on much more rapidly and successfully with her 'mob' if she were left wholly to herself; which was perfectly true. What Muriel chiefly lacked was confidence in her own powers and resources, and this lack was wholly owing to her education and surroundings, for the part of a girl's education which is obtained at school is a very small thing, compared with that which is imbibed unconsciously at home. The strongest and healthiest plant will be bleached and distorted if it be grown in a cellar, in a place too small for it, and only the exceptionally strong and healthy ones can ever outgrow the effects of the process, though brought, after the mischief is done, into fullest sunshine and widest space.

Aunt Sally watched, with ever deepening interest, the effect of moral sunshine and fresh air upon her new "niece," anxiously careful lest she should in any way hinder the processes of growth and expansion; and she soon found that she must steel her heart and practice a little seeming cruelty to be truly kind. Muriel wondered more and more, as her

little appeals, such as "Which way would you do it, Aunt Sally?" "Do you think I had better undertake" this or that, were met with advice to "Think it out and decide for yourself, dear;" for she had not failed, in being thrown so much with the Raymonds and their cousins, to hear a good many laughing and teasing allusions to Aunt Sally's entire readiness to give advice, when she "saw her way clear."

"And you know you always do see your way clear, aunty, and that's what makes you so merciless to people who don't," Marion happened to say one day. To which Aunt Sally had replied: "I hope I'm not merciless to any body. I'm sure I've no right to be; but I will say that I like to see people who know just what they mean to do, and then go ahead and do it without loss of time."

She had been trying to think of something which should entirely divert Muriel's mind from the ordeal before her, knowing that nothing would be gained by a wearying round of the same thoughts and speculations; but it was difficult to find any thing sufficiently interesting to compete successfully with the mob, and she was really glad when, rather early in the morning for calling hours, Julia Hardcastle was announced. A queer, contradictory sort of liking was growing up between Aunt Sally and Julia, its outward manifestation being generally a tilt of words between them whenever they met. Julia announced at home that Miss Bowne was "delicious," while the latter's *dictum* concerning Julia was: "She's too sensible for a fool, but she's 'most foolish enough for one, sometimes."

Aunt Sally happened to be alone in the library when Julia was shown in, and her greeting was unusually cordial, for the reason above stated, a phenomenon which did not escape Julia's observation.

"I came very near calling you Aunt Sally, Miss Bowne," she said. "You haven't appeared to disapprove of me so

little since I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance ; but I hope I know my place too well too presume upon what *must* be only an accident, or, worse still, a delusion."

" If you do know your place," said Aunt Sally, ignoring the rest of the speech, " *I* would like to know why you don't go to work and fill it."

" Do you know, Miss Bowne, that same question has often puzzled me," replied Julia, and just then Muriel entered, and Julia's attention was turned to her.

Muriel had not intended mentioning the mob to Julia, until she began to see her way a little more clearly, but her mind and heart were much too full of the subject not to run over at a touch, and almost before she knew it she was telling the whole story, and hoping that Julia's quickness might hit upon some better plan than had yet been discovered. It was, in reality, Julia's genuine interest which had drawn her on, after the first unguarded sentence, which could easily have been passed over had she been talking to some one who was politely indifferent. Miss Hardcastle began by being very much amused, then, as Muriel described the mob, and more especially the champion, and told how, to do any thing at all with them, suspicion and prejudice must first be overcome, and a belief established among them that their entertainers meant nothing but kindness, she grew interested ; it would be like playing a difficult and exciting game. She had a curiosity, too, to see how Muriel would stand such a trial of courage and resource as this would undoubtedly be. And besides, and above all this, she had a very honest desire to " lend a helping hand."

She was quite silent for a moment or two, when Muriel paused rather than stopped, for the subject was by no means exhausted and presently she said :

" You're the funniest combination of heroism and cowardice, Muriel, that it has ever been my luck to meet with !

I could no more have thought of and started such an undertaking as this promises to be than I could have flown to the moon, but yet, if by any miracle, I *had* started it, I shouldn't be a bit afraid of the whole of them, nor have the slightest desire to back out!"

"I know you wouldn't," said Muriel, wistfully, "and I suppose it was just this knowledge which led me on to talk to you about it, as if your courage might perchance be catching. I only wish it were, for I am dreadfully tempted to run away."

"It isn't courage," said Julia, "it's a variety of things. I can't explain, for I do not more than half understand it myself, but I am very certain that courage has nothing to do with it. I wish you were more easily amused, Muriel. I really don't think there are more than three things in the world which are altogether serious—two, I might say, perhaps, with safety."

"I don't see what that has to do with my courage," replied Muriel.

"It would have a great deal! A good laugh is a great power for scattering fears and apprehensions; isn't it, Aunt Bowne?"

Aunt Sally's lips twitched, but she answered serenely:

"Yes, it is, and I'm always glad to hear people laugh when it isn't at the expense of something that is worth even more. But there's an old proverb that says, 'too much of any thing is good for nothing.'"

"That remark will not condemn you to the obnoxious title of partisan, Miss Bowne. I don't quite know whether you agree with me or not. Muriel, I wish you'd let me go with you this afternoon, or rather meet you there, and 'lend a helping hand' with the girls. I've had a small class of ragamuffinesses at the sewing-school since Lent began, and I'm quite surprised to find how well I get on with them.

And I'll not interfere with any thing you may have arranged. My position shall be very meek and subordinate. May I come?"

Muriel was genuinely surprised, not only by the request, which was totally unexpected by her, but by the pleasure and alacrity with which she found herself accepting Julia's offer. And Aunt Sally hid her disappointment that Muriel was, after all, not to be left to her own devices, and tried to believe firmly that it was "all for the best." Julia took her leave soon after the hour for the appointment had been set, renewing her promise to act strictly under orders, and congratulating herself that she had happened in that morning.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEXT STEP.

"The lions were chained."
—"*Pilgrim's Progress.*"

DICK arrived punctually, just as Muriel was beginning to be afraid that something had detained him, and laughed at her anxious face.

"The boys have gone on," he said. "I gave them the key, 'as per agreement,' and they'll open the windows as soon as they get there. I couldn't catch any body to sweep it this morning; the boy I meant to ask was not at home, so I just borrowed a broom of your friend Miss Harley and did it myself, and if I do say it as shouldn't say it, it's very well done; but if I were you, Miss Muriel, 'not presuming to teach,' you know, I'd have the place thoroughly cleaned before you have the benches put in. I had not time to attack the windows, except just a brush to clear them of cobwebs, but they look like very dirty ground glass! And the floor and walls are dreadful; the man who owns it ought to have it whitewashed, but I don't believe he will."

"I shall not ask him," replied Muriel, "it will cost so little, and I do not wish to strike him immediately as a troublesome tenant. It was *very* good of you to sweep it out, Dick. I don't know how to thank you. And I'm sorry we could not get the benches in time for to-day; you'll all be so tired, I'm afraid."

"I think we can stand it, literally, for an hour," said Dick, cheerfully, "and if we find we can't, the window-sills

are wide enough to perch on, and we can take turns at them."

Muriel was tempted to suggest to Dick, as he stopped to wait for a car, that they might as well walk all the way, but she said to herself, sternly: "Don't be an idiot!" and stepped briskly into the car, determined not to let Dick see how she was quaking.

He did see, however, and exerted himself to talk cheerfully and to make her laugh, and when they reached the corner where they had agreed to part, he said:

"You're sure you'd rather meet your mob alone, Miss Muriel? For if you wouldn't, I'll either stand by you, or prowl along the other side of the street, while you make your arrangement known, whichever you like. I think, perhaps, that would be better."

"No," said Muriel, with a grateful look, "I'm not really afraid, it's only a little stage-fright, and I am *not* going to give way to it! You are as kind as you can be, Dick, but I am afraid, if my mob were to see you with me, or suspect that you were watching them, they would all flee different ways. 'Go on, I'll follow thee.'"

He went on, more reluctantly than she knew, and joined the others, who were waiting, with amused expectancy, for Muriel and her *cortége* to arrive. But when fifteen minutes passed and they did not come he grew uneasy, and in a few minutes more was just starting out to ascertain the cause of the delay, when the sound of voices and a shrill laugh approaching made him wait, and presently the procession appeared, headed by Muriel and her champion, who had an absurd air of importance and patronage. They seemed to be coming willingly enough, but this was partly accounted for by the fact that Muriel had taken the precaution to leave the packages containing the refreshments in Julia's hands.

As soon as the crowd—which this time contained about thirty—was fairly in the room, Muriel tried to make herself

heard, but quite in vain, until the champion, suddenly comprehending the state of affairs, shouted out:

"The lady's tryin' to speak, and, if you haven't the manners to hold your noise, I'll try what me fists'll do for you!"

There was an immediate silence, and Muriel, judging it best to take advantage of it rather than administer a reproof for this entirely well-meant announcement, said quickly:

"You shall have the cakes first, and then there will be some music, and then I have something to tell you and something useful to give you, and then you shall have the candy, and after that you can go home."

It was certainly to the credit of Muriel's aids that no audible laughter followed this speech, which was fired at her audience as if she mistrusted their power to keep still a moment longer. They saw nothing funny about it, fortunately, but the champion cried, shrilly:

"Three cheers for the lady! Hoo-roar!" and a deafening response immediately filled the room. The explosion seemed to do them good, for they instantly subsided, and then the cakes were promptly produced.

"May I make a remark or a suggestion, Miss Muriel?" whispered Dick.

"Of course, you may!" she answered, and he stepped forward a little, saying:

"If any body would like to sit down on the floor and eat his or her cake, there's no reason why you shouldn't!"

The response was an immediate *flop*, which shook the building, and only a few remained standing.

Muriel was amazed to see Julia. While she herself stood helpless, unable to think of any thing to say, Julia went brightly about among the different groups, saying pleasant things to them, and as much at her ease as she would have been at an afternoon tea.

The cakes were disposed of in an alarmingly short time, and then the boys, at an imploring glance from Muriel, took their places side by side to sing, and Jim prefaced the song with :

"We're going to sing you a song with a rousing good chorus, and if any body feels like joining in so much the better ! "

They struck up " Marching Through Georgia," with all the strength of their voices, and the effect was electrical. Many of the children sprang to their feet ; heads and hands and feet began keeping time, and when the chorus to the second verse was reached, there was a rush of voices which nearly drowned those of the chief singers, and Julia whispered to Muriel :

" How *did* they catch it so quickly ? Look at your knight, Muriel ! "

He was worth looking at ! Vibrating all over in time with the music, his eyes, apparently fixed on the ceiling, he was singing at the top of his voice, with a look of total absorption, which made Muriel say to herself :

" Here is the key to this nature, at last ! If other things fail I shall know what to try ; his face looks positively gentle ! "

And, as if in special mockery of her thought, at that very moment he made a dash at a boy standing some paces away and knocked off his hat, and in the momentary pause between the verses the champion's shrill voice was heard to say, in accents of strong and righteous indignation :

" Haven't you no manners at all, you dirty little blackguard, to keep your hat on your ugly head when there's ladies around ! Next time I'll knock your head, I can tell you, and not just your hat."

Julia's face disappeared behind her handkerchief, and there was a tremor of suppressed laughter in the voices of

the singers, but they went bravely on. When the song ended there was a shout of applause, and a clamorous demand for "another."

"And we'll all jine in if it is as easy as that one was!" said the champion, affably.

Thus encouraged the singers struck up "Red, White and Blue," and the "jining in" was not long in following. They began to shout for "another" as soon as it was finished, but a motion of Muriel's hand, backed by a much more significant gesture from her knight, secured a minute or two of silence, in which she said:

"You have not had the candy yet, you know, nor the useful thing I am going to give you;" and the song was no longer demanded.

There had been a hurried and whispered conference between the musicians, and now, as Muriel stood near them, opening her parcels, Jim advanced, and said in a low voice:

"Miss Douglas, we thought may be, as the little beggars seemed to like it so, and are so quick in catching a tune, that you'd like us to come next time, and really try to teach them something. We can do it quite well if you're going to hold the meeting on Saturday. Shall we?"

"You are very, very kind," said Muriel, gratefully, "and I should be only too thankful if you would, but it isn't right to you to take your time on your one holiday."

"Oh, an hour isn't much!" he said, cheeefully, "and its been great fun, so far! The captain there is worth several songs. I'm going to scrape acquaintance with him presently. Then you'll let us come? At the same time next Saturday? Very well," and he went to speak to the "captain," who proved gracious, and even expressed his willingness to learn some more songs.

"I know how to sing well enough, a'ready," he added,

complacently, "but I don't mind learning a few more toons. I'm tired of the old ones, most of 'em!"

"Where did you learn to sing?" asked Jim, with praiseworthy gravity.

"Oh, all about in spots! Hand-organs, mostly, and concert-halls, sometimes; outside seats, where you could leave without obserwation if you got tired durin' the puffawmence!"

And he winked at Jim in a manner which moved that amiable youth's mind to envy.

He was all ready to act as moderator of the meeting, when Muriel tried to speak again, and by this time she was beginning to feel more confidence in herself, from that which, in spite of his truculence and high-handed methods of discipline, she began to feel in him. She had dreaded the noise and turbulence of her mob more than any thing else, and expected to have great difficulty in making herself heard at all, and the relief of this unexpected smoothing of her way was proportionate. She waited until the candy was distributed, which helped materially in the quieting process, and then she said:

"I want you all to come here next Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. I shall not have any cake or candy for you, but I am going to bring some other things, which you will like to see, I think; these gentlemen are coming to sing for you again, and to teach you a new song besides. And we will have benches, and tables, so that we may have a nice comfortable time. Now, all of you who will come, with perfectly clean hands and faces, remember, and who will behave nicely after they come, can hold up one of those nice clean hands they brought here to-day!"

Every hand went up and a voice began:

"Three cheers—"

But Muriel hastened to interrupt with:

"Not just yet, please! In a few minutes you may, if you like. I saw, the last time I met you, and I see again to-day, with much pleasure, that some of you have combed your hair, so I have for each of you a pretty little pocket-comb, which shuts up in a case, and I hope before the next time we meet, each one of you will give his head and her head a good combing and—and—washing, and make yourselves look just as neat and clean as ever you can, and see how pleased we shall be! And another thing, if we are to be friends, as I hope we are, I would like to know your names, and to shake hands with each of you before you go; just think, if I want to speak to any one of you, I can't call you any thing but 'you,' and I don't like that—it isn't good manners. So now please come as you go out—I will stand here, near the door—and shake hands with me, and tell me what your names are."

There was a silence for a moment—a silence which Muriel could not fail to see was suspicious—then a low hum of discussion, in the midst of which Muriel's "knight" stepped boldly up to her and held out his hand, saying:

"Them cowards can do as they please, but when a lady as is a lady asks me to shake hands, and tell her my name, I ain't agoing to hang back, and if they knowed what they'd ketch when I get 'em outside of here, may be they wouldn't neither! *My* name is Jake, and I don't care who knows it!"

"But what is your last name, Jake?" said Muriel, keeping the hard, bony little fist which he had laid in her hand.

"It's Jake, ma'am, same as my first! I give you my affidavy, lady, I ain't never had but the one, as I knows of!"

"But what is your mother's name, and your father's?" she asked.

"Ain't never had neither," he answered, soberly. "I'm a young man with a hist'ry, I am; old Granny Jake, which picked rags for her livin', found me in an ash-bar'l, when I

wasn't any longer'n that—"and he measured about six inches on his arm—"and kep' me to beg for her, 'cos I was starved-lookin'! And since she died, I've kep' myself!"

Muriel asked no more questions, for the effect of Jake's intimation as to what the others would "ketch" if they persisted in "hanging back," together with the fearless manner in which he announced his own name, was almost immediate, and all, save a few, who were either stronger or fleeter of foot than the champion, and so did not fear him, filed slowly past, giving an awkward hand-shake and a mumbled name, as they did so. At least a third of them had no surname, and insisted, upon being questioned, that they never had, and Muriel was puzzled to decide whether this were a measure of caution, a literal fact, or an imitation of Jake.

Dick and Julia had been "primed" beforehand, and they stood, each facing a window, taking down the names as they were given, Dick the boys, and Julia the girls; although to make perfectly sure which were which, they were obliged sometimes to glance around.

It was over at last; the last "perfectly clean hand" had been laid in Muriel's, and as she turned from the door, her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as soon as she could trust herself to speak, "I had not had a good look at their faces before, and it seems as if they must come from some dreadful under-world, which we pretend does not exist."

"You must not take it so hard, dear," said Julia, speaking far more lightly than she felt, because she saw Muriel's over-wrought condition. "I know just what you are doing; you are fancying how *you* would feel if you were suddenly obliged to wear rags, and sleep in ash-barrels, and live in a society where polite conversation included swearing, but you must remember the vast difference it makes, never to have known any thing better."

"Yes, that would make a difference ; I see that it would ; a very great difference, though the degradation and misery are the same in the abstract, but I am glad you thought of that, Julia ; it is some little consolation. And yet, it will make it all the harder to dig them out, I am afraid ! "

"Now don't spoil your little consolation, the minute you begin to play with it ; instead, listen to these most extraordinary names ! "

And she read her list aloud.

"It beats mine," said Dick, "and do you know, Miss Muriel, I've an idea that a good many of those imps made up their names on the spur of the moment, and are chuckling now, to think how cleverly they've done us ! "

"It's more than likely ! " assented Muriel, resignedly; "but I don't think my champion did. I wish he had not such an ugly name, for fierce and dreadful as he is, he somehow interests me more than all the rest put together. I suppose because he is the only one of them who seems at all interested in me ! But was it not pretty, Mr. Armitage," she said, turning to Charley, "to see them respond to the music ? I shall no longer think the monkey is the sole attraction, when I see them following a hand-organ."

"I came upon an open-air ball the other day," he replied ; "about a dozen of the raggedest little wretches imaginable, gathered about a man who was playing on a most villainous organ, but it was wheezing out the 'Fisher's Hornpipe,' and I wish you could have seen the dancing ! That was just before Dick spoke of your enterprise, and lamented his cracked voice in such touching terms, and I will confess that my recollection of the scene influenced me to volunteer. I had an idea that there would be a good deal of fun, and there has been ! But I will also confess, that when that infant with the big, innocent blue eyes, and pinched, white little face, swore like a Turk because her neighbor 'scrouged'

her, the performance lost a good deal of its charm for me, as an abstraction—though it gained in interest."

Muriel would not put her thought into words, but she felt very sure that it was after this light-hearted boy heard the blue-eyed baby swear, that he had arranged with his comrades to come again the following week, and this was indeed the case. His life, guarded by intelligent training and inherited character, had been a very clean one, and he had seen but very little of the "dreadful under-world" of which Muriel spoke ; never enough to arouse either interest or more than a very transient compassion ; but in thinking over afterward the events and impressions of this afternoon, it seemed to him that he could never regain the careless and indifferent regard of all phases of life, save that in which he moved, which contact with these poor little waifs and strays had destroyed. And, rather to his own surprise, he did not wish to. The effect upon Jim Burnham was far less strongly marked, but he was good-naturedly willing to do whatever might be asked of him in the cause, chiefly because he liked Muriel and thought he should like Julia, and had a very sincere friendship with both Dick and Charley.

They were turning to leave the room, when Muriel said, suddenly :

"I'm afraid this place will be very damp, if we should happen to be here on a rainy day. I wish I could have found a room with some sort of fire-place in it. I wonder if it would be possible to cut a stove-pipe hole in one of the outside walls, or put a tin pane with a hole in it in a window. I saw that, the other day, in a house somewhere near here."

"Yes, it would be quite possible," said Dick, "but I don't believe the owners would let you do it. Mr. Duncan says the upper part is full of stored furniture, and such things. And yet, if you keep on coming all the year, there will have

to be some way of warming it. Would you like me to see the owners, and ask, Miss Muriel? I could get the address from Mr. Duncan, you know."

"If you can do that, I will not let you take any further trouble about it. I will go speak to the owners myself," replied Muriel, and Dick did not remonstrate with her, for he thought it probable that she would succeed much better than he would, were any concession to be asked.

They all five walked together to the corner which the car passed, the boys intending to walk home when they had seen Muriel and Julia safely in the car, but as they stood waiting, Muriel said:

"I *wish* you would all come and have dinner with me, or tea with Aunt Sally, and then we can have a little more talk about my mob—that is, if you are not entirely exhausted, both with your labors, and with the subject!"

"I am not, either," replied Julia, seeing that the boys were waiting for her to speak first. "And I will do so, with much pleasure, if you will send Rogers home with me a little before ten. That is the witching hour at which mamma begins to think that 'something must have happened,' if I do not appear or send a representative."

"I'd like nothing better, Miss Douglas," said Charley, as frankly as she had herself spoken, "but my mother would wait dinner for me, I'm afraid, for the girls, my sisters, are not at home just now, and father is so irregular in his behavior concerning dinner that he simply takes it when he arrives upon the scene, and doesn't like us to wait for him."

"I'm afraid my circumstances are equally adverse, if not exactly the same, Miss Douglas," said Jim, regretfully, "only—might I ask at what time the mysterious double-headed repast to which you alluded takes place?"

"It will not take place until seven o'clock this evening,"

said Muriel, smiling, "for I did not know how late the 'exercises' would keep me, and Aunt Sally firmly declined to sit down to a solitary meal, so I fixed seven."

"Then, if I may be permitted, I shall have time to go home and allay my mother's apprehensions, in which case I shall be delighted to accept."

"And could you not do that, too?" asked Muriel, turning to Charley.

"I certainly could," he replied, "but I had not the audacity to propose it. We modest, retiring people lose a great deal, I am beginning to find."

"You would have deserved to lose, in this case," said Muriel, laughing. "You'll come, Dick?"

"Oh, yes," said Dick. "I was only waiting my turn to speak, and to tell Miss Hardcastle that I hope she will accept me as a substitute for the venerable Rogers; but I must go home first, too, and tell the girls, or *they'll* wait. You will not take advantage of my absence to engage Rogers, Miss Hardcastle?"

"Have no apprehension of that sort," replied Julia, in her pleasantest manner; "Rogers is saved for this evening."

"What a very agreeable thing an agreeable boy is," she said to Muriel, after they were seated in the car and the boys had left them; "and how friendly and unaffected those two young fellows are. I hope they will not consider it necessary to put on any airs as they grow older. That's the worst of every thing, Muriel—nothing stays as it is, and if we don't realize that a change is going on, that makes it all the worse when we do."

"It isn't always the worst of every thing, by any means," replied Muriel; "just think how hopeless some lives—most lives—would be, if we had not the certainty of change to look forward to."

"Yes, of course; there are two sides to every thing, but I wish one might have a little voice in the matter, and at least avert the change until it is desired."

She spoke with a gravity almost amounting to sadness, for which Muriel could not account, and perhaps this feeling was indicated in the latter's face, for Julia changed the subject rather abruptly and returned to her every-day manner.

They reached Muriel's home by a little after six, and she went at once to acquaint Rogers with the state of affairs. He was much too well-behaved to express to her the consternation which he felt when he heard that four unexpected people were coming to dinner in little more than half an hour, three of whom were "young gentlemen," but he remarked solemnly to Margery, as soon as Muriel was out of hearing: "I could wish that Miss Muriel would not be quite so unconsiderate and previous. I am that flustered—and the table to be unset, and a leaf put in, and dessert to be purchased, and after-dinner coffee to be served."

"And don't you see that it's a compliment the young mistress is paying you and the cook?" said the good-tempered Irish housemaid; "and sure a pair of fine chickens is dinner enough for twice four; and I'll see to the table for you, and run out for some dessert as soon as they're seated, if you'll ask Miss Muriel what it shall be. It's the great mercy that we've a good confectioner so near hand."

Rogers was consoled, and the dinner was all any body could have asked, and only fifteen minutes late. Muriel had already, brief as had been her reign, shown a kindness of feeling toward her servants which had won their hearts, and they served her with a willingness which, without her knowledge, saved her much of the friction which attends most lives.

Aunt Sally was genuinely pleased when Muriel brought Julia in, and said that Dick and his two friends were coming

presently. It was not only because the best-beloved of her "children" was one of the party, although that greatly added to her pleasure; but she was thoroughly glad to see Muriel emerging from the reticence, almost amounting to shyness, which had seemed a few weeks ago part of her nature, but which, as Aunt Sally was now beginning to perceive, had merely overlaid it.

The dinner was a most cheerful meal, and lasted a good deal more than long enough for the cook to make the coffee, about which Rogers had been concerned. Aunt Sally's questions about the afternoon's experience were numerous, and her heart went out in an especial manner to Charley Armitage, as she discovered from little signs and tokens, quite unconsciously given by him, how deeply his feelings had been touched. She expressed her entire approval of Muriel's intention to go to the owner or agent of the warehouse, and see what could be done about some arrangement for fire. The day had been one of the suddenly-warm ones which so often come in late spring, but it would not be safe to trust to the chance of always happening on warm days. There was a great deal of talk as to what should be put into the room, and Aunt Sally vetoed so many of Muriel's proposals that the latter declared she had never been so snubbed in her life.

"My dear," said Aunt Sally, earnestly, "don't you be one of the crowd of people who are trying to run before they can walk. Make the room thoroughly comfortable. You're quite right about having backs to the benches and some sort of carpet on the floor, and you'll give most of those poor little souls a treat every time they come there; but they'll be the very first to detect, and to take advantage of, any foolishness, and you must be very careful, for a while, at any rate, and do nothing rash."

"Will it be rash to hang some pictures on those staring

walls, and some simple curtains over the staring windows?" asked Muriel, meekly.

"You know well enough that I don't think it will," said Aunt Sally, severely; "but when you talk of buying a kindergarten outfit before your next meeting, it's high time to stop you."

"But, aunty, the little children must have something to do, as well as the big ones. I can't teach a little tot of three years old how to sew."

"Then you can take some colored picture-books for them to look at, and I'll make you a big rag doll before you go again, and sew some scarlet braid into 'lines' for them to play horse with. It'll never do for you to try to keep them too still, especially just at the first. And I wouldn't let them stay more than an hour, either, any of them; they'll be twice as ready to come back if they go before they're tired. The way that little monkey who calls himself Jake suspected you of 'tracks' and Sunday-school designs is a hint as to the tactless way in which so many good people go about their good works, that you'll do well to remember."

"I wish you'd tell that to the temperance agents, Miss Bowne," said Charley Armitage. "They invite a lot of poor wretches, who haven't any home worth the name, to sit in a cold hall and be preached to for an hour or more, and then let them go home, if they succeed in catching any, without giving them a thing to eat or drink, while right across the street, perhaps, is a saloon throwing glimpses of magnificence through the doors and windows, looking warm, and bright, and cheerful, and in the front window, a picture of an abnormally large oyster with the legend: 'A fried oyster with every drink!'"

"I know," said Aunt Sally, "I've seen that picture of the oyster and the legend a number of times, and I never knew of but one temperance-lecturer who had sense enough

to make use of that idea, and he wasn't what's generally called a lecturer either. He was a little lame man who kept a coffee-stand, he and his wife together. He was generally called 'The Ready Reckoner,' because, whenever he could catch any body who drank, he'd reckon up what their 'moderate drinking' cost them in the course of a year. He sold his things just as cheap as he could, to make a living for his wife and himself, and he had all sorts of queer signs stuck up all over his stand, such as 'A fried oyster with every drink of coffee!' 'A knock-you-down-and-carry-you-out cup of tea for five cents!' I can't remember the half of them—it was a good many years ago, when the 'temperance agitation,' as they called it, was first beginning. But he really shut up two or three of the worst saloons in the neighborhood just by destroying their custom, and the good he did'll never be known in this world."

"What has gone with him, aunty?" asked Muriel, deeply interested, for here were suggestions about which she meant to ask more, at a suitable time.

"He's gone to Heaven, my dear, years ago, and his wife too, and after he died, it didn't appear to occur to any body to take up his work and carry it on. I only wish it had. And I wish all the reformers would do more to amuse the people they're trying to reform; it's half the battle, it seems to me."

"Why don't you write an 'open letter' to some of the papers or magazines about it, Miss Bowne?" inquired Charley.

She looked at him sharply for a moment, but she saw that the question had been asked in entirely good faith.

"I couldn't do it," she said, simply; "all my ideas would fly to the ends of the earth the moment I tried! But I'm always hoping that some body who can write will do it for me, and if it's somebody who has hold of the public's ear already, so much the better."

Julia had never seemed to Muriel, and to Aunt Sally as well, so likeable, and even lovable, as she seemed this evening, and they were both sorry when she rose to go. Her interest in Muriel's project, and her liking for the boys, were evidently sincere, and Muriel only wished that the side of her character which was now uppermost might be allowed to remain so.

Dick's friends went when he did, and there was an evident sincerity in their parting words about their enjoyment of the evening and their intention to call "very soon," which pleased Muriel much.

She drew a hassock to Aunt Sally's feet, after her visitors were gone, and laid her head on the old lady's knee, saying:

"The lions are chained again, aunty. I wonder if they always are?"

"If they aren't," was Aunt Sally's somewhat enigmatical answer, "they don't unchain themselves, that's certain."

CHAPTER XIII.

DISCOURAGEMENT.

"Bravely the ships in the tempest tossed,
Buffet the waves till the sea be crossed;
Not in despair of the haven fair,
Though winds blow backward, and leagues be lost.

—F. W. BOURDILLON.

IT must not be supposed that Mr. Douglas Keith had allowed Muriel's promise to permit him, at some time in the near future to call upon her, to remain unclaimed. She had met him in the street, soon after Aunt Sally's installment, and he had managed skillfully so to arrange the conversation that before they parted he had received the coveted invitation, and he did not permit much time to elapse before he availed himself of it. He had nothing to say now about her business affairs; she had, without intending to, made it very manifest that she preferred to hold the needful interviews with the senior partner, and with these arrangements he had sufficient tact not to interfere, especially as, under existing circumstances, he preferred not to talk to Muriel about her money. He could not understand the motives which were prompting her, and consequently he set down the actions which seemed to him so singular to the score of whims, and waited patiently for the "attack of charity," as he termed it, to wear itself out.

He had made up his mind when his father called upon him for help in settling the estate, and before he had seen

Muriel at all, that, unless he found her positively repellant, he would fall in love with her, and, after an engagement as short as she could be induced to make it, marry her. He had never yet allowed himself to fall in love with any one, for he had been well aware that, unless he could discover a charmer who possessed the solid charm of a fortune, marriage would mean, for him, an amount of economy and self-denial which he by no means felt inclined to practice. He had a small inheritance from his mother, the interest of which, with his share in the business, gave him an income upon which he managed to dress faultlessly and move in the best society, to smoke the best cigars, to drink, in very small quantity, the best wine, and to go every summer for three or four weeks to the gayest and most fashionable resorts. But he was laying nothing by, he was obliged to do without a great many things which he would have liked to have, and the impression grew upon him that something must be done. He was much too cautious to resort to speculating or stock-gambling ; indeed, it was a fixed rule with him to do nothing in secret which he would be ashamed to let all the world know, and he had too much genuine good feeling and affection for his father to count upon his death. His older brother, with a much better head for business than he himself possessed, was making money in various perfectly legitimate and respectable "outside" ways, which enabled him to lay by nearly all the income which he received as a member of the firm, but he "gave the whole of his mind to it," caring nothing for general society and living very simply and economically.

It was quite certain that Muriel would never be considered, or consider herself, a beauty, but her face pleased most people, and sometimes under the influence of pleasant excitement was very pretty. Her figure was good ; she carried herself well, and was too free from self-consciousness

ever to be awkward, and Mr. Keith was most agreeably impressed during the business interview which began their acquaintance. This impression deepened, as he meant that it should, every time he met her, in spite of his disapproval of the new turn of affairs given by her charitable schemes. He regretted very much that she was not going into general society, which he relied upon to change a good many of her views as to the best manner of spending her money, but he consoled himself with the reflection that her seclusion need not be of very long duration ; then, when she should emerge, with the worldly advantages she possessed, it was scarcely possible that her zeal should last.

He confided his ideas to no one, but set quietly to work to win, first of all, the position of a friend of the house, who should be welcome whenever he should choose to come there, and, perhaps, had Muriel been in charge of a nominal chaperone, instead of a friend so real, and so wide awake to her best interests, as Aunt Sally was, he might not have found this position very difficult to win, but as it was, he did not seem to himself to make much progress. Muriel was more than merely civil ; she was pleasant and friendly, for he always amused her, and managed, besides, without becoming fulsome, to let her see his admiration for, and interest in her. The most difficult part of his self-assigned rôle was that of listening, with an appearance of interest and approval, when she talked of the rebuilding of the row of houses recently purchased, or of kindred schemes, while in reality, he considered his father culpably remiss in not restraining her from every thing of the kind. And almost as difficult was the work of keeping on even outwardly friendly terms with Aunt Sally. She had an apparently innocent way of showing up the weak spots in his conversation, which kept him painfully on the alert, for there was nothing which so annoyed him as a suspicion, however remote, that he was

being laughed at. And he wondered very much, but had no way of solving the problem, whether it were by accident or design that Miss Bowne was always "about" when he called on Miss Douglas!

Another cause of uneasiness to him was the frequency with which he began to meet Neil Duncan at the house, and the very evident favor with which Aunt Sally regarded him. About Muriel's views he was uncertain; her quiet, almost indifferent manner to Mr. Duncan might be assumed for the benefit of a discerning public. And Mr. Duncan, he observed, either really was, or managed to seem to be, thoroughly posted on the subjects which, for the present, occupied so large a share of Miss Douglas's thoughts. Meanwhile Muriel, happily unconscious of the various speculations and comments of which she was the object, became daily more engrossed with the work which seemed to unfold itself before her. She succeeded in working Aunt Sally up to the pitch of going with her to investigate the place of which Miss Prudence Harley had told her, and, although the time of year was not very favorable to the somewhat rugged aspect of the country, she was so delighted with it that she declared her intention of founding a summer colony there, apart from the one which she hoped to found for the benefit of the dwellers in the row. The small houses of which Miss Harley had spoken were in somewhat better condition than her description had led Muriel to expect, and the agent, who had had no offer for them for years, was quite willing to make them habitable for the summer, if he could be assured of renting them for four months. Aunt Sally and Muriel visited every one, planning and suggesting as they went from one to another, until by the time they had made the round, they had "located" every family which could be expected to come, and settled in the largest house fragments of three or four of the families which had

members whose business engagements compelled them to spend the summer in town.

There was not even a country tavern in the place, and none of the boarding-houses were yet open, so Miss Harley had insisted upon giving them a letter of introduction to "Jane," who seemed delighted to see them, and entertained them most hospitably, urging them to stay all night, and "look about a little more" the next day. Muriel was greatly tempted to do this; the free air of the hills seemed to her so thoroughly delightful after her long imprisonment, but she saw that Aunt Sally would prefer to return the same day, so the invitation was gratefully declined. It seemed to Muriel that she could hardly wait till the next day, when they reached home that evening, so eager was she to spread her plan before her tenants, and witness their pleasure at the idea of four months in the country. It was already late in April, and the row ought to be vacated by the middle of May, at the latest, so there was really no time to be lost, and Muriel went on her mission early the next morning smiling and confident. Aunt Sally was a prey to dark forebodings, as she saw Muriel set forth in this frame of mind, but said nothing, except to herself, and to this trusty confidant she whispered:

"There's no use in throwing cold water on her beforehand, poor little soul! How sweet and bright she looks. I'm afraid she'll be singing another song when she comes back."

She was. With one exception only, her plan had met either with mere toleration or downright opposition. All the tenants, when they were once made to understand the advantages which the rebuilding of the row would give them, and, with much more difficulty, that on their return the rent was not to be "raised on" them, had been quite willing to leave the houses for the time required, and had

graciously consented not to fix upon their temporary homes without first consulting either Miss Harley or Muriel herself. It was one of Aunt Sally's suggestions that Miss Harley might be appointed as a sort of agent to report to Muriel any thing which the tenants wished reported, or any of her own observations which would help in the "administration of justice." Miss Harley was a clear-headed woman of business, and had told Muriel frankly what she would consider a fair compensation for doing this, which, she said, would not take so much of her business-time as it would in the cases of many other people, because her shop was so much resorted to by the dwellers in the row, and they were so in the way of coming to talk to her about their affairs. The sum she named had been so small that Muriel had tried to insist upon doubling it; this Miss Harley had gratefully but very firmly declined, and Muriel, seeing that it would be useless to urge it, desisted.

Muriel could have chosen no one for this unique situation who would have filled it so satisfactorily as Miss Harley did. She seemed to know by instinct exactly what was and what was not worth repeating, and any information which she was not able to give Muriel offhand she appeared to have no difficulty in obtaining for her. She had not considered it within her promise to repeat the various expressions of dissatisfaction at the trouble of finding temporary quarters, and of moving twice within so short a time, which she had heard, and she had exerted all her influence to awaken gratitude, and failing that, reasonableness, among the people; but her success had only been very partial. Most of them were of opinion that the houses were good enough as they were, or that, at any rate, all they needed was a little repairing. One of them had mentioned her views on the subject directly to Muriel, who, thinking some of the others might

feel the same, had caused the houses to be thoroughly inspected by a builder. His verdict was, that they had been badly built in the first place, that one or two would soon be, if they were not now, positively unsafe, and that none of them were worth repairing, and she told Miss Harley to circulate this statement freely, and Miss Harley did it, and about three people in the row believed it! But Muriel had fancied that whatever reluctance about leaving their homes might be felt by these people was due to the belief expressed by Mrs. Boyce, that it would be almost or quite impossible to find homes in so decent a neighborhood for the amount of rent they were paying there, and it seemed to her that most of them, and especially those who had children, would be rejoiced with the opportunity to spend a whole summer in the country. She went first to Mrs. Boyce and unfolded the plan to her, but without mentioning her intention regarding Lizzy and Robert. Mrs. Boyce's tired eyes sparkled with animation as Muriel described the country and the vacant houses at from one to two dollars per month, and the cheapness of so many articles of food. But the light died out as she said, shortly and ungraciously:

"You mean to be kind, I believe that; but even if I could find plenty of work there, as you seem to think I could, Lizzy and Robert must not lose their situations. If any body I know should go, though, I would like to send Frederick there to board for a few weeks, if I can manage it; he is quite able to do light work in part payment for his board."

"I have a plan," said Muriel, hesitatingly, and feeling strangely embarrassed, "if you will not think I am impertinent; indeed I do not mean to be. A friend of mine, who is nearly blind, and will soon be quite, is staying with me, and will be at my house all summer; I expect to be away from home a good deal, and Miss Post—that is my friend's

name—will miss me, I am afraid, for although she has a very nice little maid to wait upon her, I am in the habit of reading to her for awhile every evening, and of course she would miss that. My house is far larger than is necessary just for my aunt and myself, and I thought, perhaps, you would be willing to let Lizzy come to me as soon as you could be ready to go to Hartswell, and Robert too, for there is a little garden which I wish kept nice through the summer, and he could easily do all that is to be done in it in the evenings, and perhaps sometimes in the early morning. There are two small rooms near those occupied by Miss Post which are never used, and though the house is on the outskirts of the city, I think they could manage the distance."

"And do you mean," asked Mrs. Boyce, looking keenly at Muriel, "that you would consider that what they could do outside of their business hours would pay for their board and lodging, or only the lodging?"

"I mean both of course," said Muriel, speaking much more at her ease now that she had made her proposal. "You see," she added, in her most business-like manner, a manner which she was sedulously cultivating and of which she was already rather proud, "where five people are to be provided for, the board of two more will be a very slight additional expense!" This was a sudden inspiration from a recollection of something she had heard Miss Harley say, and she could see that it took instant effect.

"That's true," said Mrs. Boyce; "but still it seems very little for any body to do for their board and lodging, very little!"

"That depends upon how you look at it," said Muriel, smiling. "Lizzy and Robert may think it a great deal to give up their evenings as well as their days, and of course you can not give me an answer until you have spoken to them, so I will not detain you any longer now."

"I can, and I will," she said, with sudden decision. "My children have never yet openly disobeyed me, and whatever they may think, they shall do as I say. If you will let me take the smallest and cheapest of those houses, one of those which rent for a dollar a month, I will do it, and whatever may be your real motive for making this offer to my children, I thank you."

Muriel dared not remonstrate, or suggest that coercion was not the best form of government. The woman's somber manner made her thoroughly uncomfortable, and she was glad to escape into the open air; but first she asked that Lizzy and Robert might be sent to see her, either that evening or the next, and Mrs. Boyce promised that they should.

She was glad even of this grim and reluctant consent, and consoled herself with thinking how different would be the reception of her proposal by the other families; and it was different, but difference does not always imply improvement. At the next house, a widow with two little children worked in a laundry, and took lodgers in two rooms which she managed to spare from the three which the house contained—for having no back buildings, none of the houses contained more—and as she was a good workwoman, she made a comfortable living, and was able to pay the small fee demanded at the day-nursery where she always left her children. She admitted that she had meant to dismiss her lodgers and rent a single room during the time occupied by the rebuilding of the row; that she would have no difficulty about being "taken on" again at the laundry, upon her return, and that, if she could get two or three washes, or day's work, every week, at Hartswell, it would "about make it square;" but she did not think she would like the country; it must be very lonesome; the children were well enough where they were; they would miss the day-nursery,

where they were learning nice ways and their letters. And it would cost more than it would come to, to send furniture away off there, just for three or four months.

Muriel was ready for this emergency.

"I expect to send up what furniture will be really needed for each house," she said, "and I shall charge nothing for the use of it, as I am obliged to ask you to leave your homes at some inconvenience to yourselves; but I have no interest to serve in urging you to take one of these houses —they do not belong to me—and as, from what you say, I infer that you have a room in view, we will say no more about it."

"You don't need to be so hasty, Miss Douglas," said the woman, as Muriel opened the door, utterly discouraged. "I haven't any room *engaged*, and if it's all as you say about them houses, and no charge for the furniture, and work to be had in the near neighborhood, I don't care if I go. I dare say it will be good for the children, after all."

"Very well," said Muriel, trying to keep down the provoked feeling which rose at the condescending words and manner. "Do you wish one of the larger or smaller houses? The largest are only two dollars a month."

"Then I'll take one of them," she replied, quite graciously. "Four rooms, I think you said? It may come in my way to take a few lodgers or boarders."

The interviews varied, of course, in some particulars, but the spirit was the same, almost without an exception, and Muriel resisted the temptation to finish her campaign by going to Miss Harley for sympathy, fearing she should say something to be repented of concerning her tenants."

"Why, you poor child, you're all tired out," said Aunt Sally, as Muriel came into the library, and dropped wearily into a chair. "Did you walk all the way home? What in the world have you been doing to yourself?"

"I've been having it done to me, dear," replied Muriel, "and I don't feel as if I should ever smile again."

And she proceeded to give Aunt Sally the minute account of her adventures which was always looked for and listened to with such keen interest now; and before she had finished they were both not only smiling, but laughing, for somehow, as Muriel told of her various receptions, she began to see the ludicrous side of the affair, and by the time she had finished she was quite ready for the consolation which she knew would be forthcoming, and for the cup of tea which Margery quietly brought in.

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed Muriel, gratefully. "How did you know I was tired to death, you best of good women?"

"And what need is there for you to tire yourself to death, I would like to know, Miss Muriel?" asked Margery, sternly, as with gentle hands she removed Muriel's bonnet and wrap, and placed a footstool under her feet. "A body might think you worked for your living, to see the way you come home of late."

But she did not say how a chance word from Rogers about his young lady's pale, tired face, when he opened the door, had sent her in with the welcome cup of tea—and the scolding.

"My dear," said Aunt Sally, when Margery had departed with the empty cup, "I don't wonder you should feel a little put about with having your kind intention toward those poor souls so ill received; but so far as I can make out, only those who were really tied by their work, which they dared not lose, refused to go to Hartswell, and you've gained over the one you were most concerned about, Mrs. Boyce, and that's a double gain, for the more I think of what it will be to have that light-headed little girl come under Miss Post's care and influence, the better I'm pleased

with the whole arrangement. And after all, there are two sides to the question, as there always are, if we would only believe it, and these people can't be altogether blamed for hanging back a little from what must seem such a great undertaking to them. Just think; I suppose at least half of them have never been an hour's journey outside the city, and they don't know whether they'll like it or not. And they certainly showed a good deal of faith in you in consenting to go at all."

"Yes, they did; I see that they did," said Muriel, in such cheerful tones that Aunt Sally saw she need not continue her exordium, nor add the lecture. "And I do believe that some of them are really glad of the chance of a few months in the country, only they're quite above saying so. It was funny to see how afraid they were of expressing any pleasure, much less gratitude."

"They're not alone in that," said Aunt Sally. "I've wondered more than a little, and many a time, at the calm way in which people take favors—as if they'd say 'thank you,' because it was good manners to say it, but that, if you did but know it, they were only getting their due. And that's what we've got to learn, or part of the what; to keep right ahead, and do the right thing, whether we're thanked, or ignored, or blamed, and to do our own share of thanking whether other people do theirs or not."

"That is one thing about Miss Post," said Muriel. "I don't think I ever saw any one so sweetly, beautifully grateful for every thing that is done for her, and even for a good intention, as she is. It always seems a surprise, as well as a pleasure, to her. Do you notice how Maidie adores her already, and is jealous and almost sulky if Margery dares to wait on her?"

"Yes, I've seen that several times. That little girl won't be a half way friend to any body. She's a queer,

fierce little soul under her quiet, prim manner. But she can hardly fail to catch some of Miss Post's gentleness."

"I wish I might catch a little! I was so provoked at those people this afternoon that I felt like saying: 'Do you think it matters to me what becomes of you? Just go wherever you please!' How surprised they would have been if I'd said it!"

And Muriel laughed at the vision conjured up by her words, as she jumped up lightly and went up stairs with her bonnet and wrap. But when she was alone, the subject of one of her discussions with May came up again. Did she really feel more encouraged about her tenants, as she thought over her talk with them, or had the pleasant room, and comfortable chair and timely cup of tea been the true causes of her modified view? It was very puzzling; hopelessly so; so instead of wasting any more thought upon it she turned her mind to the arrangement of the room in the warehouse. The days flew by so; here was Wednesday, already, and if she did not set to work at once Saturday would catch her unprepared. And she would have some pictures on those bare, ugly walls, even though Aunt Sally should scold her for extravagance! And she must not fail to go to-morrow and see if she could make any arrangement for a possible fire.

She went rather late in the afternoon by Aunt Sally's advice, for the man who received the rent for the warehouse was a "wholesale dealer" down town, and would probably be too busy to attend to her in the morning. He seemed almost too busy as it was, but he listened patiently, and seemed really sorry to be obliged to tell her that he feared the risk would be too great; that the owner of the warehouse used the upper part for the storage of furniture, of which he was a manufacturer, and that his loss would be heavy should a fire occur. They could have rented the

lower room long before, he added, if they could have consented to having a fire in it,

That gave Muriel an idea.

"Then there is a fireplace?" she half-asked, half-asserted.

"Yes," said the man, and then looked vexed with himself for having made the admission, but having made it, he went on to explain:

"You see," he said, "that place was once a dwelling-house, a good many years ago, but when the neighborhood began to be taken for shops and warehouses, it would not rent for any thing worth while. Mr. Sellers was not willing to turn it into a tenement-house, and the rooms were too large if he had been, so he began to store there the furniture that was crowding his manufactory, and now he keeps the upper part full pretty much all the time. He don't put any thing in the lower room, both because he's afraid of dampness, and because it's been broken into once or twice. He had that down stair's chimney-place boarded up and whitewashed over, so that it wouldn't show. If it had been me I'd have had it bricked up solid!"

Muriel did not say so, but she thought:

"I am very glad it was not 'me!'"

"I will not detain you any longer," she said. "Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, miss, and I'm sorry we can't accommodate you," he said, evidently both surprised and relieved that she made no attempt to take advantage of his incautious admission that there was a fireplace.

"His name is Sellers and he is a furniture-dealer," she said to herself, as she walked briskly away from the scene of her apparent defeat. "I am afraid he will wish he had bricked it up, but I'm so very glad he didn't!"

She stopped at the first drug-store to which she came, and consulted a directory, finding the address without any

difficulty, and having "made a note of it," she went home much better satisfied than she had expected to be.

Aunt Sally had gone to take tea with her children, who were giving what Dick insisted upon calling "a fandango," to a little bride who was a friend of theirs.

"It's so very mild, Miss Muriel, only the Craigs and the Osbornes, besides the happy pair," he had pleaded, when he brought the invitation; "don't you think you might come?"

But Muriel, mindful of her resolution not to give needless offense, regretfully declined, and wrote for May and Miss Forsythe to come and dine with her.

May came alone.

"I did not know whether you would want me, without aunty," she said, "but when I said that aunty made a little remark about 'the pride that apes humility,' which sent me for my hat at once! How glad I am to see you again. How well you're looking! Give me another kiss?"

They had not met for two weeks, through no fault on either side, and Muriel was quite as glad of the meeting as May was, although she really felt disappointed that Miss Forsythe had not come too.

"Aunty fully expected to come," pursued May, "but just at the last minute, literally, a young girl in whom she is interested came in, and we found she was thinking of going this evening to one of those hateful variety-theaters, with a party of men and young girls from the store. She's a nice warm hearted little thing, and has done so many pleasant things for aunty, but she has about as much head as a bonnet-pin, and her home is very dull and dreary. So aunty did what is polite for winking at me, and I didn't dare not to mind, so I hurried on my things and said good-by, and just as I left, aunty was saying: 'Now you'll take off your hat and stay and have tea with me, Lizzy, and I will walk

as far as the car with you, when it's time for you to go home!' And it will please me to know what they'll find to eat, for when we're going out to dinner, we act accordin'! However, aunty is quite capable of cooking breakfast for tea, and buying another breakfast as she comes home from putting Lizzy in the car."

"Then you think the girl staid?"

"I don't doubt it! She is very fond of Aunt Agnes, and whoever has the last word with her has the influence as a general thing. And she is so pretty I could just sit and look at her!"

"And her name is Lizzy, you said? What is her last name?"

"Boyce. Why, do you know her?"

"I have met her once; she called on me," said Muriel smiling. "If you hadn't dodged me with a persistency worthy of a better cause, lately, I should have told you all about it."

"And you couldn't tell me now, I suppose?"

So Muriel told and May listened with eager interest and sympathy, for she had not heard the result of Muriel's effort to put some of her tenants in country homes for the summer, although she had heard all about the homes, and had begun to talk, at first jestingly, and then in sober earnest, of persuading her aunt to take the best of the "huts" and go into camp for the two weeks' holiday, which was all that Miss Forsythe was allowed. She was delighted when she heard of Mrs. Boyce's consent to take one of the houses, and of the arrangement which was to be made for Lizzy and Robert.

"The way is opening, isn't it dear?" she said. "Its curious how one part fits on to another like a Chinese puzzle, or like that story of which I used to be so fond in the days of my very early youth, where the pig wouldn't go over the

bridge, and all the hard hearted creatures and things refused to help. Do you remember?"

"I never so much as heard it."

"You poor child! You shall, then, even at this late day, hear the happy conclusion. The old woman who owned the pig had simply told all these creatures and things to help her, but when the last one refused, being a mouse, she offered an inducement—a piece of cheese, and at once 'The mouse began to gnaw the rope, and the rope began to hang the butcher, and the butcher began to kill the ox, and the ox began to drink the water, and the water began to quench the fire, and the fire began to burn the stick, and the stick began to beat the dog, and the dog began to bite the pig, and the pig went over the bridge, and she *did* get home in time to cook her old man's supper after all!' Now, I wish the modern novelist would take this simple tale for his guide. I do so like a story with a nice comfortable ending!"

"Then you think 'the moral of that is,' that in one shape or another, the piece of cheese is always necessary to begin with, at least?"

"In one shape or another, yes. It does not always do to take it too literally. And that reminds me—how are you coming on with the arrangements for your mob?"

"Why, just at this minute, the pig isn't going over the bridge so fast as I could wish. There is a little bother about the room, but I don't feel particularly discouraged, for I think I have the key to it."

And Muriel explained about the chimney, ending with:

"I think I'll write my note to Mr. Sellers at once, if you will excuse me, for I wish you to read it, and see if it can be made any *politer*."

So the note was written, and pronounced as polite as it was possible for a note to be, and then dinner

came in, but did not interrupt the flow of eager talk, and May wondered to herself at the change which even two weeks had made in Muriel ; she was so much more cheerful and courageous ; she was showing such an increase of confidence in her own power to will and act ; and in it all, May detected, or fancied that she could detect, Aunt Sally's bracing influence. The end of the evening came a great deal too soon for both of them, but soon after ten, and when they both thought that it was soon after nine, Aunt Sally appeared, escorted by Dick, and Dick insisted upon substituting himself for Rogers as May's escort, and he did not have to insist very strenuously, for there was a hearty liking between these two, and they always enjoyed being together.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WAY OPENS.

"And if some things I do not ask
In my cup of blessing be,
I would have my spirit filled the more,
With grateful love to Thee;
More careful, than to serve Thee much,
To please Thee perfectly."

MURIEL had arranged with herself not to expect an answer to her note to Mr. Sellers for three days from the time at which it was posted. "That will allow," she said, "for his being away for a day, or wishing to think about it, or to consult his agent, and I mean in all my business transactions to be very reasonable!"

So she was agreeably disappointed when the noonday delivery brought her a very yellow envelope, directed in an unknown hand. But she found the note which it contained painfully brief; it merely said:

"Will Miss Douglas be kind enough to call, between four and five o'clock on Friday afternoon, at No. ——, Devonshire street, and oblige,
W. SELLERS."

"Do you think it looks as if he would yield, aunty?" asked Muriel, laughing, as she handed the answer to her effort at polite letter-writing to Aunt Sally.

"I can't exactly say that, child," replied the astute Miss Bowne, "but it is certainly hopeful, for if he meant positively to say no, it would have been much easier to write it than to bring you there, and say it to your face!"

"Why, of course it would! I think he is all ready to yield, but wishes to appear to have to be convinced in order to satisfy his agent."

She encouraged herself in this hopeful view of the case, and went quite cheerfully in the afternoon at the appointed time. She found the place without any trouble—a large furniture-establishment—and was shown at once to Mr. Sellers's office. Her first impression was very favorable; he was a tall, heavily-built old man, with a shrewd, kindly face, and white hair. He met her courteously and apologized for bringing her to see him, rather than going to see her, on the score of want of time. Muriel thought this might, perhaps, be a hint that the interview need not be a long one, and so proceeded at once to business, saying that she hoped, since he had not refused her request, that he meant to grant it, if she could satisfy him that he would incur no risk.

"That is about it," he said, with a very pleasant smile. "You see, Hearns, the agent, told me what you wanted the room for, and I hated to lay a straw in your way, but I have a good deal of money stored up above there in the shape of furniture, and materials for it, and I felt a little doubtful—in fact, I may say, a good deal doubtful about letting you have a fire there, but I thought I could tell better after I saw you. I had a sort of an idea that you'd be—well, somewhat older than you would appear to be, and I thought if you seemed like a careful person, and would promise to let nobody who wasn't careful have any thing to do with the fire, we might see about it. How often do you expect to use the room?"

"Only once a week, for the present," replied Muriel. "And I think I could safely promise all you wish, even if we should come, as we very possibly may, to use it oftener. I would not ask you, of course, to be at the expense of opening the chimney."

"How do you know there's a chimney to open?" he interrupted; "it doesn't show from the front outside. Did you see where it was boarded up inside?"

Then as she remained silent, fearing to make trouble for the agent, he burst out laughing, and said:

"I see! That's just like Hearns! What sort of a stove did you think of putting in, Miss Douglas? A good deal would depend upon that."

"I had not gone that far," replied Muriel, with rising spirits, "and I would be willing to leave that entirely to you, Mr. Sellers."

"Come now! That's reasonable enough, I'm sure. You see, I've been thinking the matter over, and I've come to the conclusion that it would be safer for you to use wood; then the fire need not be made long beforehand, and it can be put entirely out before you lock the room. Wood's expensive, I know, but I doubt if it will cost you much more than coal, used in this way, and it will be time enough to think about coal, if we find wood isn't going to make the room warm enough for cold weather. I should think you'd better have a little fire every time—a shut-up room always has a chilly feel, even on a hot day, and a fire helps ventilation!"

"Is the chimney deep enough for a fire on the hearth?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, yes; it's *deep* enough," he answered, "it was built a good long while ago, that house was, but I'm a little afraid to let you try that—a few loose bricks somewhere up the chimney might make mischief. I'll tell you what, and he brightened suddenly, "There's an old Franklin stove, in my garret at home, an unusually large one, that I will never use again, most likely. How would you like me to put that in for you?"

"I think it would be delightful!" said Muriel, warmly;

"they could see the fire then, just as well as if it was on the hearth."

"So that's it, is it? Well, I don't know but you're right; it's a cheerful, homelike thing, an open fire. I don't think these modern contraptions are clear gain, by a good deal. How soon do you expect to use the room again?"

"To-morrow afternoon; so I am afraid we can't have the fire till next time. It does not matter, though, for the weather is quite mild, and I will have the shutters opened in the morning and the windows lowered from the top. I have a friend in the neighborhood who will look in every little while and see that all is right. Besides, I have the wood to order yet, and I don't believe I could get it and have it sawed in time now."

"You'll want a place to put your wood," he said; "so when you get it send a boy that you can trust to me, and I'll give you a key to the cellar; the door's outside, round in the alley. You'll keep the key yourself, please, along with the one to the door. And some of your scholars ought to saw and split it for you, I should think."

"Perhaps they can; and I am very much obliged to you for speaking of the cellar. I was wondering where I should put the wood. Of course, you will let me pay you for the use of the cellar and of the stove?"

"For the cellar, yes," and he named what seemed to Muriel a very trifling sum, "but for the stove, no. It's doing no good where it is, and so I'll do as a good many of us do, I reckon, in our so-called charity, give something I can't use myself and shan't miss! I suppose you wouldn't let me drop in if I should ever be passing of a Saturday afternoon?"

"Only if you'll help," said Muriel, smiling, in the lightness of her heart, as she rose to go; "if you'll sing them a song or tell them a story, you may come and welcome."

He laughed good-naturedly, saying :

"I might manage the story, but I'd rather be excused from the song, and they would, too, if they did but know it !"

They parted in a very friendly manner, Mr. Sellers telling her not to be afraid to come again if there was any thing she wanted, and to come straight to him without going to Hearns first.

She stopped at a large art-store on her way home, determined to have one or two pictures on the bare walls the next day, and resolving to sacrifice her own feelings, and choose some brilliant chromos, but she felt so entirely at a loss as to subjects that she told the clerk who waited upon her that she wanted them for the walls of "a sort of ragged school," and especially wished for something which would please the boys. Her sweet, earnest face and pleasant manner enlisted his interest, and he pulled out his wares with great good will, offering suggestions of which she was very glad, and the result of which was that she purchased the three which he assured her were the most brilliantly-colored of the whole stock—a prairie on fire, with a stampede of wild horses and buffaloes in the foreground, a fiercely-contested naval engagement, in which no less than three ships were in different stages of fiery consumption, and a truly startling eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

"I think I ought to have something that the little girls would like, too," she said, smiling at the effect of these three works of art ranged in a row beneath the counter ; so a dazzlingly-white cat, with three spotted kittens ; a hen with some very yellow chickens, and a field full of sheep and lambs, the lambs as white as the cat, and the grass as green as green paint could make it, were added, and the address of the warehouse given, with the request that the "order" should be sent the next morning by some one who would hang it effectively.

"They really are dreadful!" said Muriel, with a shudder; "are you quite sure the children will like them as well as real pictures?"

"I am quite sure," replied the clerk, emphatically but respectfully; "if you do not find that they 'give satisfaction' we shall be most happy, of course, to exchange them for pictures of a higher grade."

She was about to leave the shop when her eye was caught by a very beautiful steel engraving of "Christ Blessing Little Children."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I must have that, too. Surely any one, the most utterly ignorant, can see the beauty of that Face."

So she added this one "real picture" to her order, with great satisfaction, directing that it should be hung in the most conspicuous position, and then hurried home to tell Aunt Sally her good news, sure of that helpful sympathy which was the great secret of the attraction felt by nearly every one who came even within the limits of acquaintanceship with Miss Bowne.

She found Dick waiting for her, with a favorable report concerning benches; they were to be "on hand" the next morning, when he would be, too, and would arrange the room, which had been cleaned and whitewashed, for the afternoon's campaign.

So she had two deeply-interested listeners instead of one, and Mr. Sellers would, doubtless, have been much gratified could he have heard the flattering remarks which his behavior called forth.

"But I'm sorry you didn't let him go ahead and have the chimney opened for to-morrow, Miss Muriel," said Dick, at the conclusion of her narrative; "I could easily have scared you up enough wood just for the hour we shall be there, and it would be so much jollier to have a nice bright fire."

"Of course it would," said Muriel, "ever so much; but when he was being so very nice and kind, I did not like even to seem to take advantage of him. And there'll be the pictures; I didn't tell you about them yet."

And she proceeded to describe the chromos, adding:

"The eruption of Mount Vesuvius is almost sufficient of itself to warm the room, and the weather is so mild now that I don't believe we shall suffer. Miss Prudence is going to look after the room through the morning, and see that it is well-aired; and by next Saturday we shall have our Franklin stove and the room will look lovely! Miss Prudence has put up the curtains and put down the carpet too, and just think what a difference that will make."

"May I ask what you propose to do with your mob to-morrow besides giving it a singing-lesson, Miss Muriel?" inquired Dick.

"I have the dolls and some 'pieces' and sewing-materials for the girls," she answered, "but I was afraid to buy tools by myself; I don't know any thing about them, so I thought, perhaps, you would get me something in the morning, though I hate to ask for so much of your time on your one free day."

"That's all right. I have no special engagements for to-morrow! But I'm a little puzzled about it, myself. Do you suppose any of them would have sense enough to learn scroll-sawing, for instance?"

"Why, yes! Of course they would! Do you know how to do it yourself?"

"Yes, ma'am. I had quite a fit of it a year or two ago, and I think I might give instructions on a pinch. So I'll get some proper wood and a dozen saws. I suppose that'll be enough to start with? I can do it in the morning."

"Then I'll give you the money at once. That is a great

relief to my small mind. Oh, Dick, what a comfort you are! I wish I might have had a brother."

"Here when I am brothering you with all my might, that's all the thanks I get for it! "I shall go home at once!

"No, stay to dinner. Make him stay, Aunt Sally! I haven't finished talking to him, and you've not had a chance to say a single word, nor to hear how the girls are after the 'fandango,' or any thing!"

"I can't, really, this time," said Dick. "I promised the girls some carpentering this evening. But you ask me the next time I'm here, Miss Muriel, and see if I don't. Good-by!"

"Aunt Sally," said Muriel, when he was gone. "I wish you might have the opportunity to 'bring up' a whole orphan asylum!"

"I've wished that myself, sometimes," said Aunt Sally, with that perfect candor which occasionally became startling, but which Muriel always found refreshing, "for I don't think there's any other work in the wide world that's half so interesting. But, then, there's the other side. A boy like Dick, with such a father, and mother, and home as he had, was more than half brought up by the time he knew how to talk! I'll not deny that I think I've been able to help it, for it does my heart good to think so, but it's been such a little, compared with what I found done to my hand, that it's hardly worth mentioning. And you're helping him, Muriel, too—helping him over one of the hard places of his life. He doesn't talk out his grievances the way most people do, and sometimes I think they go all the harder with him for that very reason; but he's having all he can do to keep on going to school, and wait till he's eighteen before he takes hold of the farm. He's a born farmer; he hates living in a city, and he's so tall and strong, and so well posted about his chosen pursuit, that it's

my belief that he could take hold of that farm to-morrow and farm it well, though I don't expect to tell him so ! I don't think any amount of driving would keep him in the road, but he's being led. He knows well enough that if he should take his head and do as he likes, there's nobody with the real authority to hinder him, for if he couldn't get hold of Dovedale just yet, he'd have no trouble in getting a good place on one of the farms in the neighborhood, for he's known and liked all through there ; but he knows just as well that the half-dozen or so of people whom he really loves would be grieved and disappointed, and that's what holds him back And that's the way in which I should bring up the orphan asylum—not with ' You must not ' and ' You shall not ' every other word, but make them love their Saviour and their earthly friends too well ever willingly to give them pain. I picked up an old book of ' Gail Hamilton's ' the other day. I forget the name of it, but it was one of her early ones—smart, but not too smart—and I was mightily tickled with a story she told about a calf and a fence. She said she saw a movable fence, to set down on a lawn, so that you could let a cow or a calf graze without hurting the shrubbery, and she told that man she calls ' Halicarnassus ' about it, and said what a good plan it was, and if they only had one they could let the calf graze in the front yard. So the next morning he called her out and told her to come look at the new iron fence, and the calf grazing ; so she went, and there was the calf, tied by a long rope to something—she couldn't quite make out what, at first—and then, all of a sudden, she said, ' Why, that's our old crowbar ! " And Halicarnassus said : ' Well, the fence you saw was a centripetal fence, and this is the new centrifugal iron fence—that's all the difference ! ' So it seems to me that a centrifugal fence will hold firm, when a centripetal one would be knocked down or jumped over."

"You only drive my conviction in deeper, aunty," said Muriel, laughing. "I shall not be satisfied till you take an orphan asylum!"

A sudden change in the weather on Friday night made Muriel wish that she had been more prompt in investigating the fire question. Saturday morning was raw and chilly, with a gray haze instead of sunshine, and a decided threat of rain. By afternoon it was a little less threatening, but the wind was still east, and uncomfortably cool.

"You mustn't stay long in that room to-day, child," said Aunt Sally, as Muriel was making ready to go, "and I do wish you had something hot to give those poor little souls instead of dolls and scroll-saws! I'd put off every thing but the singing and a little talk till next week."

"I suppose I'll have to," said Muriel, rather dolefully, "but I did so wish to see how the little girls would behave when they saw the dolls. Well, at any rate, it will be fun to hear what they say about the pictures."

The suggestion of "something hot" appeared to Muriel so good that she revolved it in her mind as the horse-car jogged along, and, being in very good time, she stopped at Miss Prudence's shop, and asked if there were any restaurant near enough for a supply of soup and soup-plates, or bowls, to be sent in.

"Why, yes," said Miss Prudence, "there's a little French place right around the corner here, where they make first-rate soup—very likely out of the bones folks leave on their plates, but that's neither here nor there—and the man who keeps it is an obliging little soul. I have my bread and cakes baked there, often, in warm weather. Now, if you like, Miss Douglas, I'll go and give the order—he'd not be a human restaurant-keeper if he didn't charge *you* two prices—and I suppose if he hasn't enough of one kind, he can just send whatever he has?"

"Yes," replied Muriel, greatly pleased, "and I'm so very much obliged to you, Miss Prudence. You'd better say enough for forty—there were thirty last time—and oh! a slice of bread apiece, don't you think, too?"

"I'll fetch the bread from a bakery—and my bread-knife. There's no use in paying five cents a slice for it. And if he can't send all the soup, I know of another place. You go on, Miss Douglas, I'll see that it's all right."

With a much lightened heart Muriel went on, but stopped at the door with a bewildered feeling that she must have come to the wrong place. She had not seen the room since the carpet had been put down and the curtains hung, and she was prepared for a change; but the chimney had been opened, the Franklin stove put up, and a merry little fire was crackling and sparkling on tall, brass andirons. The benches and tables had been placed conveniently about the large room, and seemed to diminish its size. The chromos adorned the snow-white walls, and Muriel was obliged to admit they added to the general cheerfulness; the engraving hung over the fire-place, somewhat lower than the other pictures, and in front of it the few children who had already come were gathered, holding out their claw-like hands toward the fire. Dick and his two friends stood on one side of the fire-place watching her face as she took it all in, but they came forward as soon as she saw them, and then she saw that Julia was there, too.

"You didn't ask me," said Julia, meekly. "So I will go home, if you say I must; but I did want just to see how the room looked. Please, may I stay?"

"May you stay!" repeated Muriel. "Of course you may; don't be a goose! I did not suppose you cared to come again. I thought if you did you would have said so, and I was afraid if I asked you, you would come just to please me."

"And I was afraid," replied Julia, "that if I asked leave to come, you would be too polite to refuse, even if you didn't want me; so I resigned myself to fate, though I really did wish to come extremely, and then I met Mr. Raymond accidentally, and he told me about all your arrangements, culminating in the Franklin stove. That was before lunch, this morning. So, after lunch, I pretended to myself that I had an errand somewhere in this neighborhood, and after that I simply came!"

"I am very glad you did—very glad, indeed," said Muriel, with such evident cordiality and sincerity that Julia looked much pleased. "You have a way of talking to them that fills me with admiration and envy, and, with you to help, I even feel that one or two of them may possibly learn to thread a needle. But I am overcome by that stove. Dick, were you in the conspiracy?"

"Only since this morning," said Dick, "when I was here having the benches and tables put in. Two men came first and opened the chimney, and they'd hardly finished and gone away when two more came with a half-wagon load of wood, sawed, but not split, and the stove perched on top of it. I helped put the wood in the cellar—they brought the key, and left it with me, after they'd made sure I was responsible—and came back in time to light the fire. They left a note for you, too; I've got it somewhere; oh! here it is."

This was all there was of it:

"Will Miss Douglas allow an old man, who is too busy making money to look after his neighbors, to salve his conscience by giving a little of the money?

"Very respectfully, W. SELLERS."

"Yes, I think I will," said Muriel to Julia, who, responsive to her gesture, was reading over her shoulder. "If

he'd just sent money, perhaps I wouldn't; but he's taken the trouble to send 'money's worth.' And I begin to see such boundless vistas of 'opportunities.' Where are the rest of you?" she asked, turning to the children, some half-dozen, who were now going from picture to picture, making free and very amusing comments.

"They're comin', lady; they're waitin' for Jake," said the boy who was standing nearest to her. "But Jake, he's too stuck-up for us, and we're not goin' to let him boss us no longer! He said for all of us to wait for him up on the corner yander, and then he'd a' marched us in, like he owned the whole bilin' of us; but we weren't takin' none o' that in our'n, so we jest——"

The doughty speaker's voice suddenly died away, and he stepped behind Julia, thus placing her between himself and the door. For at that minute a scuffle of feet and confusion of tongues was heard, and Jake appeared at the head of his army, the balance of the thirty who had come on the previous Saturday, but, somewhat to Muriel's surprise, no more. He pulled off his ragged cap as he entered, and, evidently prompted by this signal, the rest of the boys did the same.

"You can hang your hats up here," said Dick, coming forward and directing them to one corner, where a long, narrow board, decorated with a row of clothes-pins driven well into it, hung within reach of the smallest boy there.

"Oh, Dick!" said Muriel, beaming on him. "You think of every thing!"

Which remark seemed to Dick "an over-payment of delight" for the hour which he had devoted to the manufacture of the hat-rack. But before he could say that, or any thing else, Jake's voice was heard in its most truculent tones, saying:

"And so you thought you'd be mighty smart and git the

start of me, hey? Well, you just come outside here for about a minute, where the ladies can't see us, and I'll show you how smart you are!"

"No," said Charley Armitage, stepping forward as the "smart" boy, braced by the stinging taunt, was about to accept the invitation. "You take me instead; that boy isn't as big as you are by several sizes, you know, and gentlemen don't fight with fellows smaller than they are. Come on, and I'll stand quite still while you pitch into me, and then we'll come back and have the music—the ladies are waiting, you see!"

Jake's face was a study, but he did not stir for a moment. Then he turned his back on the enemy, with a great show of lofty scorn, remarking:

"The gentleman's right—you're too small entirely for me to take any notice of you, or to keep the music waiting while I lick you!"

Julia, with her face entirely concealed from view, appeared to be rapt in a study of Mount Vesuvius. Muriel's fright at the threatening aspect of affairs deprived her of all desire to laugh, at the time, and the three boys managed not to laugh aloud.

"Come," said Julia, turning round suddenly; "sit down, please, all of you—you see there are plenty of seats to-day — and then we will have the music at once. You are to join in just as soon as you can pick up the tune."

They sat down immediately, and Jim and Charley struck up the song agreed upon, in which there was to be a slight change in the words of the last verse, so as to leave out the "ghost."

It was "Cockles and Muscles," and had been chosen for the pretty, plaintive tune, so easy to catch. As before, the children began to sing almost immediately, and were fairly

shouting when they came to the last verse. As soon as it was finished two or three boys called out :

" Let's have ' Marchin' Through Georgy ' agin' ! "

So they had it, and went so wild over it that Muriel hailed with joy the appearance of Miss Prudence, followed by two waiters, with apparently unlimited soup. She herself had a large basket of bread.

" Well, I declare ! " she said, as she came in ; " what a nice, clean-faced parcel of children ! "

" Our hands is clean, too, ma'am," said the blue-eyed baby, without any profanity this time ; and it pleased Muriel to see that this made a good many of the children laugh.

But it made her heart ache to see the eager, hungry look which came into their faces as soon as they smelt the soup, and the wolfish greediness with which it was devoured. She paid the waiters for the soup, and Miss Prudence for the bread, very glad that her order had been for forty, for not a vestige of either was left.

Then Muriel, feeling far less shy and awkward than she had felt a week ago, unwrapped the dolls, while Dick displayed the saws, and she explained to the children that these treasures were to be kept in the room and used every week. The boys nearly all showed pleasure and eagerness to learn, but it was nothing, compared with the delight of the girls over their dolls. A very few were indifferent, but most of them astonished Muriel by the change which came over their faces. They hugged and dandled and rocked the dolls. When Muriel and Julia began to write the name of each girl on a slip of paper, and to pin it to the doll she held, until they could be marked with ink, several of them exclaimed :

" Oh, lady, please don't stick a pin in my baby ! "

They had been made to understand why the names were put on the dolls—that each one might have the same doll

next time—and Julia and Muriel exchanged glances, as at least half a dozen of them gave names which were not on the list made the week before. But they judged it best to take no notice of this discrepancy.

"We must fix up some kind of a locker for them to keep their things in, Miss Muriel," said Dick, as he piled up the saws in the corner, while Julia collected the dolls, for it was too late to begin the lessons to-day.

"I think a row of little closets, with their names on the doors, would be best," replied Muriel. "There might be a shelf or two in each. But I'll have a carpenter to do it, Dick—that one in whose shop you work sometimes—and if you will leave the order for me, you can make him understand better than I could."

"I suppose I must," said Dick, regretfully; "but I do wish there was time for me to make them. It would take me two or three Saturdays, though, and you ought to have them by next time."

"I'm just as much obliged to you as if you did it," said Muriel, gratefully. "I suppose we must tell the poor little souls to go," she added. "I hate to do it—look how they're gathering about the fire. But it's after five, now, and Aunt Sally will be worried if I'm late."

"She wouldn't thank you for saying she'd be 'worried,'" said Dick, laughing. "She despises people who worry. Miss Muriel, look there, will you."

Muriel looked. Jake was standing in front of Mount Vesuvius, looking at it with critical and rather skeptical eyes. He turned to Julia, who had purposely come near him, and asked:

"What's that a picture of, anyhow—a chimbley?"

"No," said Julia. "It is a mountain, Jake, that is all on fire inside, like a chimney."

"What's a mountain?"

Julia paused a moment; then:

"See here; I'll show you," she said. "Come here to the hearth."

And taking the shovel she heaped up a little pile of ashes and coals, saying, as she worked:

"Now, we'll suppose the hearth is the flat ground like the street, and this match is a man; see, when I stick him up so, in this crack, the mountain is ever so many times higher than he is."

"Oh," said Jake, "then a mountain's just a hill that's growed up higher. Are they all on fire inside, like that?"

He had returned to the picture, and gazed, fascinated by the display of fireworks depicted by the artist.

"No," said Julia; "only a few of them."

"How did they get afire, anyhow?"

"We don't know. There seems to be fire in the inside of the earth, and sometimes it breaks out through the top of a mountain."

"Why don't they put it out?"

Julia glanced at his face. He was in dead earnest.

"What could they put it out with?" she asked.

"Water," he replied, with evident scorn of her ignorance.

"They can't," she said. "Where could any body find water enough to put out a whole mountain on fire?"

"Out of that river," and he pointed to the Bay of Naples. "I'll bet they'd do it, too, if it was here in Boston."

"Perhaps they would," said Julia, in a quivering voice; and then Muriel asked for silence, and made her little speech, praising them for their clean hands and faces, and "much neater" hair, inviting them for the next Saturday, and promising that the girls should learn to make clothes for their dolls, and the boys to saw, and that there should be "more soup."

"Taking the shovel, she heaped up a little pile of ashes and coals."
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They listened quite quietly, but when she stopped, Jake said:

"Please, lady, wouldn't they give us just one more afore we go?"

And he jerked his thumb toward Charley and Jim.

"Will you?" asked Muriel, smiling.

"Yes, indeed," said Jim, readily.

Charley said something to him in a low tone; he looked a little embarrassed, but nodded, and they began, "I was a wandering sheep."

Muriel was greatly touched and pleased—too much touched to meet their eyes, for, once more, she felt that her own were filled with tears; the children were singing directly, the tune only, of course, but either she fancied it, or a change stole over the little faces, all of them either bad, or brazen, or hard, some of them all three. She was standing close by Julia, and quite unconsciously caught her hand and held it fast till the singing ceased. Then their eyes met, and Muriel whispered unsteadily, "Why, it's made you cry, too!"

Jake stepped forward and held out his hand, saying: "Thank you, lady; we've had a high old time, and we'll all come next Saturday. And I won't lick no more of 'em that ain't my size—you can tell *him*—and he pointed at Charley. "Nobody shan't say I'm no gentleman! And we'll go right off, as soon as you've told us, but who's He, and what's He doin' to them children?"

Muriel's heart leaped; she had been much disappointed that none of them had spoken of this picture. She thought a brief, fervent prayer for the right words.

"That," she said, distinctly enough for them all to hear, "Is the Saviour of the World, one Who died to save all of us from badness and sorrow, and punishment. He has gone away to His home in another world, a beautiful world,

where nobody is sick, or poor, or in pain any more, and if we follow Him, He will take us all where He is, when we die. I am going to tell you a great deal more about Him next time ; but now, say this after me, all of you, please, 'Who loved me, and gave Himself for me?'"

After two or three trials every voice seemed to join, and then she let them go.

"You are the bravest, after all," whispered Julia, as the last flutter of rags disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

ADVICE—ASKED AND UNASKED.

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls."
—ROBERT BROWNING.

IT was only by taking backward glances, from week to week, that Muriel could see much growth in her scholars. Little by little they learned, with humiliating, discouraging lapses and relapses. Jake's fiery temper and domineering disposition came very, very slowly under the law of love, but they came—for when Muriel, trembling at her own daring, had told them in simplest words, the story of the birth, the life, the death of the Saviour of the World, it seemed to impress none of them as it did Jake. He had implicit faith in Muriel, by this time, and when she told it, he listened with eager interest and excitement, raging at the wickedness and cruelty of the Jews, wondering why "God didn't kill the whole of them." But when, at last, he fully comprehended; when Muriel told him of the two great armies all over the world, the army of God, and the army of the devil, the spirit of evil and sin; that one must take one side or the other; that the Saviour Himself said, "He that is not with Me is against Me;" that every time he conquered his temper, or a temptation to lie, or steal, or swear, he was winning a victory for his Saviour, the Captain of his salvation; then the change began which she wondered to see. The struggle was as fierce as every thing about him seemed to be; he would come to her with heart-broken questions, as to whether he could be forgiven and allowed to "try again,"

he talked to the other children, trying to fire them with zeal to "fight for our side," and as he had a following of admiring imitators, and was feared as well as admired, his influence was noticeable in the behavior of the rest. His love for, and devotion to Muriel were very touching to see, and comforted her under many discouragements. And the vivid manner in which his belief impressed itself upon his life, often made her ashamed for her own lukewarmness.

Aunt Sally went with her to the warehouse on the third Saturday; she had managed to decline on the two previous ones, and Muriel decided in her own mind that she had been purposely left to herself, that she might "find her feet" and stand firmly. Julia kept on coming; Kate began to come; May stole the time once or twice from her busiest day in the week, that day to which nearly every thing but her daily school duties seemed to be postponed! Dick kept on with ever growing interest and resource; Charley and Jim came for a closing "sing," or, if they were hindered, sent substitutes, until before very long, Muriel knew and liked the whole club.

Mr. Sellers "dropped in" more than once, and always told the required story; the children liked him and listened with eager attention to his: "Now, when *I* was a boy," and whatever reminiscence would follow. The number of children kept on increasing till the room was well-filled, and Muriel discovered after a good while the reason why it had not increased more rapidly at first—the first comers, led by Jake, had forborne to mention their new resort, fearing that if too many came, "the lady" would stop giving them things! But after Jake began to "fight" in earnest, he was as eager to gather his mates in, as he had been before to keep them out.

All this, of course, was the growth of many weeks, and many other things were growing at the same time. The re-

moval of the families in the Row, under Miss Prudence Harley's able generalship, was accomplished without much friction, and her suggestions were most valuable.

Muriel happened to speak to her about the furniture she meant to send, and mentioned mattresses, when Miss Prudence exclaimed :

"Now Miss Muriel ! Why should you run into such a needless expense ? What you want is, to send up a dozen large sacks, the size of a bed, of some coarse, cheap stuff, and they can fill them with fresh, sweet rye-straw, and throw it away when they come back ! And don't you go buying bedding—make each family take its own. They won't need so much as if it was winter, but they'll need more than just sheets, for its chilly up there !"

This was only one instance out of many. Muriel fell into the habit of consulting Miss Prudence on all doubtful points connected with the summer campaign, and always found her equal to the emergency.

May Douglas was quite in earnest about taking one of the houses for the two weeks' holiday in July, and Miss Forsythe consented, more to please her than because she herself felt very enthusiastic about it. She would have preferred a plan which would have given them both rest from the "wearing" housekeeping which attends a narrow income. But she very rarely urged a plan simply and solely because she preferred it. Before the bargain was concluded, however, May, in the fulness of her joy about it, told the Raymonds what they were about to do, and was met with a general outcry :

"Why, May !" said Marion, "we've been *counting* on having Miss Agnes and you for your vacation. We've talked so much about it that we considered it quite settled."

"After all your talk about liking to garden and fish, and take long tramps, Miss May !" said Dick, reproachfully.

"Please don't take the house, dear; we shall be so very much disappointed if you don't spend your vacation with us," said Alice, earnestly. "We're going to ask Miss Muriel to come for as long as she will, not just because we want Aunt Sally, but because we like her, and want to see more of her, and we thought we would try to arrange to have you all there together. Isn't that an inducement?"

"Yes," said Marion, before she could answer, "and Rose and Jack, and Fanny and Stephen are *all* coming, and we meant to have somebody in every single room, and go on a pic-nic nearly every day. You can't resist that!"

"But it's all so sudden," said May laughing. "You take away my breath. Pray, how was I to know that you were hatching such a delightful conspiracy?"

"You weren't to know till it was ripe," said Dick, "we were going to spring it on you, as it were, after every thing was arranged; but when you go to talking of dragging poor Miss Agnes off to a howling wilderness, where you'll not have any thing much to eat but wild raspberries, and will have to do your own cooking, it is high time for your friends to interfere; and, unless you really prefer the society of the Row to that of the Raymonds, you haven't a word to say, but 'Yes, thank you, I shall be most happy!'"

"I am very much tempted to say it," replied May, "subject, of course, to Aunt Agnes's veto; but one reason I had for wishing to go to Hartswell was, that Muriel expects to be there a good deal of the time this summer, and is talking of trying to find places for some of the 'mob' to board for a few weeks, and I thought perhaps I could help her in some way. I haven't been able to, you know, on account of the school."

"I think you ought to rest during your short holiday, dear," said Alice, "and I know Miss Muriel would think so too. Come, will you leave the decision to Miss Forsythe?

You know you have great confidence in her judgment, so you can trust her to decide."

"If I did not mean to go I should have stopped my ears and fled at the first attack," said May, "for it sounds very tempting and I feel myself wavering, so I will save my dignity by leaving the decision with Aunt Agnes."

"Then we are quite safe!" said Marion, joyfully, "for I know she'd rather come to Dovedale than go to that outlandish place and consort with the 'mob.'"

Which, although Miss Forsythe did not put it quite so forcibly, proved to be precisely her view of the case, and May's slight disappointment at the failure of her plan was entirely effaced when she found that Muriel had accepted the invitation to Dovedale for at least the two weeks when May and her aunt would be there. Aunt Sally would stay a month; but Muriel said it must depend upon how her various affairs were prospering, whether she also could stay so long or not. There would be no trouble about leaving the house. Margery and Rogers had summered and wintered there for so many years that they would have felt it more of a penance than a pleasure to take a holiday now. The housemaid would go home for a visit, for she would not be needed during Muriel's absence. Miss Post had been urged to say freely whether she would prefer to stay where she was or to go to some quiet country place during this time, and, finding that the house would remain open in any event, she had elected to remain there.

"You see, my dear Miss Douglas," she had said to Muriel, "I am quite used to these two rooms now, and can find my way about easily, while it would take me some time to get used to a new place. I don't think Maidie will suffer, or I would not stay; but this house really is almost in the country, and much better situated than her aunt's, to which she would go back if she were to leave here. I can't

help thinking what it might have been if you had not found me just before this little cloud settled upon me. It gives me such confidence for all future straits. It would be absolutely wicked ever to doubt after this!"

Muriel found her room at the warehouse so cool, even during the sudden and "trying" warm weather which came, as it so often does, early in May, that she had a great desire to give the children more benefit of it than the two or three hours a week which they spent there allowed them. Aunt Sally and she agreed that if only some suitable person could be found to sit there and keep order, and see that nothing was carried away, they might be permitted to come there and work or play, as they chose, two or three times a week. But where could they find the suitable person?

"It's my belief Margery would do it," said Aunt Sally, after "studying," as Rogers would have said, for several minutes. "You've told me, you know, my dear, how it was she who first helped you to help any one, and I've been thinking lately that now, when your chances are widening so, it would be only fair to see if she wouldn't like to share some of them with you. She's such a sensible body, and so warm-hearted under her stern manner, that she could be fully trusted in any thing she would undertake, I think. And she's very fond of children, and good to them, I should judge, by the way she's behaved to Maidie, and is behaving to that young flibbertigibbet who came the other day, and who is nothing but a child, for all her little grown-up airs and graces."

"Yes," said Muriel, switching Aunt Sally back to the main track, as one of her own children might have done it, "Margery *is* very good to Maidie and Lizzy, and to Robert too. She is really quite enthusiastic about Robert; he is a young man after her own heart. I heard her telling Maidie only yesterday, that *he* never forgot to hang up all his things

in their proper places! I suppose poor Maidie had been leaving something that should have been hung up on a chair, or, still worse, on the floor! She's only human after all. So perhaps Margery would enjoy having a chance at my 'mob' two or three times a week. It's really a shame for me to call it a mob any longer; but the name seems to stick. I will ask her, anyhow, and if for any reason she should not see fit to do it, she will not hesitate to tell me so."

"No, that's one thing I like about her," said Aunt Sally, "you may always believe exactly what she says about every thing."

"But, aunty, don't you you think it is possible for one to be perfectly frank and honest without being quite so blunt as Margery is sometimes, and saying things that are calculated to hurt people's feelings or make them angry? I am used to her and don't mind her, generally speaking, because I know how much worse her bark is than her bite; but I should love her still better, I think, if she didn't even bark."

"Yes, I suppose a body could be honest without being blunt, and it isn't always necessary, either, to proclaim an abstract truth because it *is* the truth. I've suffered for speaking out more times than I could count, but never, that I know of, for keeping still when I might have spoken. And I've yet to find the person who has."

"You shall not put yourself in the same boat with Margery, Aunt Sally!" said Muriel, stooping to kiss her. "You might as well compare a Damascus blade with a butcher-knife!"

Aunt Sally laughed.

"You see you're calling me sharp, yourself, childie," she said; "sharper even than Margery is!"

Muriel took the first opportunity to speak with Margery

about the plan of opening the room two or three times a week through the summer, for the benefit of the children, and when the old woman admitted that it might be a good plan, Muriel said :

" You see, we'd have to have some one to sit there and keep order, and see that they don't carry off the things, and lock up the closets after they're gone, and I was thinking, Margery, if you would be willing to do it, you'd be just the very person. You're so clever with tools, that you could help the boys as well as the girls, and I don't know of any body else, at all, whom I'd like to have for this so well as I'd like to have you."

Margery's face showed her gratification, but she said duly:

" I thought you had all the help you wanted, with your fine cousins and Mr. Richard, and his young men from the singing-class. I'm too old-fashioned, I'm thinking, to pull in the same boat with the like of them ! "

Muriel threw her arms about her old nurse's neck, laughing, as she said :

" Now, Margery, don't pull your head in every time your shell is touched ! You know you'll do it, and that the children will all like you, and that the boys will think you're a wonderful woman, as soon as they see how you can handle a hammer and saw ! "

" And when would you like that I should go, Miss Muriel, my dear ? " asked Margery, ignoring Muriel's speech, but passing her hand softly over the " bonny brown hair," as she spoke. So they settled upon two afternoons in the week besides Saturday, and it was not long before Margery was the most zealous of all the corps.

Muriel felt what almost amounted to a twinge of jealousy, as she saw the queer friendship which presently sprang up between Margery and Jake. But she need not have felt

even a twinge. No friendship for any one else could ever supplant his "lady" in his heart, and it was partly because Margery was of his lady's household, that he first gave her his allegiance, and seconded her authority with the other children.

She was astonished, as Muriel herself was, to see how quickly the children had learned to use their hands, to behave with some sort of propriety, and to moderate their voices. The rule regarding the "perfectly clean hands and faces" had been rigidly enforced, and had done much in the way of civilization.

Among the other additions to the room—and it was one of Julia's many suggestions, which, as she frequently did, she carried out herself—was a pair of large screens, each with three leaves; just light frames, like clothes-horses, with brown chintz tacked upon them. These were put in opposite corners, and behind each was a table, with basin and pitcher, soap and towels. There had been several cases of heart-breaking, and one or two of sulking, when children had been sent home, as they expressed it to "clean theirselves;" so now, instead of being sent home, they were conducted to the sheltering screen, and given to understand that if they could not emerge with spotless faces and hands, then, indeed, there was no appeal, they "must go!"

"There's entirely too much Ancient Roman in your composition, my dear," Julia had said to Muriel, when this subject was under discussion; "just consider—I don't suppose that half the poor little sinners have any place where they *can* wash their hands and faces, except the drinking-fountains, and I don't believe you'd make your own face 'perfectly clean,' with nothing but a drinking-fountain, and not even a towel, much less a wash-rag!"

"Perhaps I wouldn't," said Muriel, laughing, but inwardly wincing a little under the "Ancient Roman" accusa-

tion, because she knew it was deserved ; "so we will have the screens and the wash-basins, and I'll even go further—I will give each of them two towels, and a wash-rag, and a large cake of soap, and see what comes of it. Aunt Sally was bemoaning her hard lot last night, because, she says, she doesn't have a quarter enough to do. I've caught her twice lately, through her own inadvertence, when she's been 'round at the flat making ginger-bread for 'her children'; so I shall buy a piece of huckaback, with malice prepense, and give her eighty towels and forty wash-rags to hem ! "

If there had been a little spice of mischief in Muriel's voice and manner when she took the huckaback to Aunt Sally, and gave the "order," it was entirely thrown away. Miss Bowne produced her shears at once, with a lively sense of satisfaction—a feeling that she was not living in vain, and all she said was :

"It's a very good idea, my dear—of course, I suppose about half of them will lose the towels and soap, and half of the other half will sell them or pawn them for a few cents, but if only a quarter of them put the soap to its proper use, it will have been worth while, but you've only about an eighth as much huckaback here as you'll need ; there's not more than twelve yards in this piece. You'd better get at least six more pieces to-morrow ! "

"I will," said Muriel; "I never thought to ask how many yards there were. 'A piece' of any thing like that always sounds like such a great deal."

"That's no way to shop," said Aunt Sally, severely; "no way at all ! You should always know just exactly what you're buying, and how much you're paying for it. I thought you were more business-like than that, Muriel ! "

"So did I," said Muriel, meekly. "But I'll never do so any more, Aunt Sally. You know that one of the aims of my existence is to be business-like ! "

"And it's a very good aim to have, if it's *an* aim, and not *the* aim," replied Aunt Sally, as she drew threads and cut off her towels with a rapidity which made Muriel suggest that perhaps she had better send for the other six pieces of huckaback that afternoon.

"That is just the trouble," said Muriel, in the perplexed tone which was so frequent with her. "It is so hard to keep *an* aim from becoming *the* aim, aunty—to keep oneself from growing lop-sided! And I do not suppose even a thing which is very good in itself ought to be allowed to swallow up every thing else, do you?"

"No, my dear, I don't; and I'm very glad you asked me the question, for I have something on my mind I've been wanting to say to you for some time. I've heard you say that when you first left school, you meant to keep up certain of your studies, and especially your music and drawing, but I don't see the least sign of it! You may think you have not time, but if you'll excuse me for saying so, you have! I don't suppose you do more light reading than most girls of your age do, and so far as I am any judge, all the books you buy and take from the library are nice, bright, wholesome things, with no harm in them intrinsically. But all the same, to my way of thinking, they come under the head of trash, for they fritter away your time, and leave you nothing to show for it. Now don't misunderstand me, dear, and think I would like you to be lop-sided the other way, for I wouldn't at all. We all need to be entertained as much as we need to be fed; but over-entertaining is just as bad as over-feeding, if not worse. Now I wish you'd tell me, honestly, if you think I'm meddling, and would rather I'd not go on? I've not half finished yet!"

Muriel drew a stool to the old lady's feet, sat down on it, and looked up in the earnest face:

"Aunt Sally," she said, with equal earnestness, "what do

you take me for? When you give me a nice, motherly scolding like this, I feel as if I really belonged to somebody. Please to go on and say every single thing that is on your mind. I deserve it all, and a great deal more."

"Then I hope you'll profit by it!" said Aunt Sally, briskly, but following the remark up with a kiss, which she rarely vouchsafed any body, voluntarily. "And if you don't like it, you can stop me next time I begin. What I was going to say was, that when you come home tired, and don't feel like doing any thing special, if you'd really *rest* for half an hour—lie down and shut your eyes, and tell Margery or me to call you, if you should fall asleep, when the time's up, you'd be nicely freshened up, and ready to take hold of something worth while; but you drop into an easy-chair and pick up a book, or one of these everlasting magazines that are always cheating people out of their spare time nowadays, and you don't half-read, nor half-rest, and perhaps a whole hour will go off in that way, just because you think it will soon be lunch time, or dinner time, or something, and it isn't worth while to go at any thing special. But it is! I hardly ever see, now, something mother and I always used to have on hand that we called our 'pick-up work'—something all ready to go on with, whenever we happened on a few spare minutes or an odd half-hour. And by keeping things like mending, and small makings, for that, we left ourselves a great deal more of our solid time, such as a long afternoon or evening, free for things that couldn't just be picked up and laid down again in a few minutes. I do believe that nobody ever yet accomplished any thing much, who hadn't this faculty of using odd bits of time, just as nobody ever saved much money, who thought five cents here and ten there didn't matter. Now just think—we're alone together here, at least half our evenings, and with the good light you always have,

you could draw well enough, I should think—couldn't you?"

"Yes, ma'am! Perfectly well!"

"Very well, then—I don't see why you don't do it! Now tell me, honestly, how many novels and stories have you read since I've been here, besides what have been in the magazines—that is, if you can remember, for I should think you'd have them all mixed up in a tangle like odd threads of silk."

"Aunt Sally, you are merciless! Let me see—I was reading, 'The Lady of the Aroostook' when you came, for I remember I couldn't help reading aloud the most delightful places, and you laughed at them just as much as I did! That happened to be the first of Howells's stories—for one can hardly call them novels—which I had read, and it tickled me so that I went straight on with him, and read 'Their Wedding Journey,' and 'A Chance Acquaintance,' and 'The Undiscovered Country'—that makes four."

"There was one more; I saw it on the table here; what was it? Oh, 'A Modern Instance,' wasn't it?"

"Yes, but that does not count, for I only began it—when I came to where that horrible girl runs after the *horribler* man, and makes him marry her, I threw it as far as I dared throw a library book in a new binding, and didn't look at it again. And I began one more of his and didn't finish it. I forget even its name, but it is one in which he undertakes to prove that the young woman—the young gentlewoman—of the present day has but two resources, if she becomes penniless, making bonnets for servant girls, and marrying!"

"See here, you are not sticking to the point! Four, you'd counted. Now go on; you can criticize them after we've finished counting, if you like."

"Thank you! Well, then—I can't remember the order in

which they came, but that's no matter. Uncle Arthur brought me a lovely story called 'The Rose Garden,' by Miss Peard ; he said he had seldom been so pleased with a story, and somehow, though we are so different, I always like the books he likes. So that led me on just as the 'Lady' did, and I read 'Cartouche'—most of it aloud to you and Miss Post, Miss Bowne—and 'Mother Molly,' and 'Unawares,' that makes eight. And 'Rudder Grange' is nine ; and 'One Summer' is ten ; but that is a very, very small one ! I believe that's all."

"I should hope it might be ! I've been here just about two months, so that's a little over one a week. And there's your marker in 'The Making of England,' which you were going to read aloud to Miss Post and me evenings, just where it was when I came, if I'm not very much mistaken ! "

"You are not, you cruel woman. I only wish you were ! But, really, I'm very much obliged to you, aunty. 'So *very* much obliged,' as Margery tells me I said to the dentist who pulled out a small aching tooth of mine some fifteen years ago. I had no idea of my fiction-inebriated condition, and I was under the impression that I had no spare time at all. Oh, aunty ! it is dreadfully hard to be good all round, isn't it ? "

"Yes, dear, it is ; there's no doubt of that, and I often think we'd have a right to be discouraged if it wasn't for such promises as 'He giveth more grace,' 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' and for knowing that we only have to take one day at a time. And, Muriel, when there's an open mind, ready and willing to take such things as I've just said to you, things that many a girl of your age would resent, or else laugh at, it seems to me it's half the battle."

It certainly was in this case. Muriel took a very earnest and prayerful resolution to save instead of squandering time, and was not long in finding the comfort of it, and in

discovering that the growth of her charitable enterprises and the undertaking of new and more extended ones were not incompatible with a fair amount of leisure for other pursuits.

The invitation to Dovedale was given, and very gratefully received, but she could not convince herself at once that she was at liberty to accept it, and only her reliance upon Aunt Sally's clear judgment induced her to do so. Aunt Sally knew just how beneficial to a nature like Muriel's the busy, cheerful life of a large family would be, with what renewed strength and freshness she would take up again her own burden after having her thoughts diverted from it for a little while.

And there was another reason, which the old lady would not formulate, even in her own mind. Neil Duncan had of late become a very frequent visitor in Muriel's home, and the stiffness, almost amounting to ungraciousness, which had characterized his manner toward her in the beginning of their acquaintance had entirely disappeared. Aunt Sally, in what she afterward regarded as her "heathen blindness," had taken an early opportunity to rate him soundly for his want of "manners," and to represent to him how valuable their friendship might be to both of them, if he would only show himself friendly.

"But, Miss Bowne," he remonstrated, "just look at it impartially! Here I am a penniless clerk on a nominal salary, without even good clothes, and here Miss Douglas is, a sort of a millionairess. Yes, I know it isn't really millions, but it is from my standpoint, and if I were to go making myself very friendly, as you call it, she would naturally think but one thing, that I had designs upon her hand for the sake of the fortune in it. It isn't so very long since you were commending the wisdom which keeps me from attempting to go into 'society,' and even from visiting

much among nice girls who might shake my resolution not to fall in love with any body until there is at least a remote chance of my being able to marry her, for I don't mean always to be nothing but an eight hundred dollar clerk, you know, and I begin to see a prospect of a rise both in salary and position. And now here you are, actually berating me for not being 'more friendly' with a young woman who, while she is not strikingly beautiful, is certainly not wholly unattractive, and who is so painfully rich by comparison, that if I were to fall madly in love with her to-morrow she should never know it!"

"I declare!" said Aunt Sally, who had with difficulty kept herself from interrupting him, "for a person with so much sense, you're too foolish for any thing! I did hope you, at any rate, were above this penny-dreadful romance idea that a man and a woman can't be friends without one or the other falling in love, as you call it. Here's this girl —nice, sensible, warm-hearted, as free from nonsense of that sort as if she were eighty, for she'd never believe, I'm very sure, that a man loved her until he told her so in so many plain words. She's trying to use her money for the good of other people; she's thankful for every suggestion, for every 'opportunity,' as she calls it. And here you are, with just exactly the experience and knowledge that would help her, and just because of this foolishness you can't be friends. I do believe," and she *pounced* round upon him with sudden indignation, "that what you're really afraid of is that she will fall in love with you."

He colored deeply, and a look of such extreme indignation swept over his face that Aunt Sally was half frightened, but only half.

"I don't think I should submit quietly to having such a thing as that said to me by any one but you, Miss Bowne," he said presently, "and even to you I must

say that I hope you will never say any thing like it again."

"I don't suppose I ought to have said it," admitted Aunt Sally, not in the least penitentially, but in a spirit of fairness and candor, "but it struck me suddenly, and I spoke before I thought. But I suppose we're all of us more or less welcome to our opinions, and if two and two don't make four they certainly don't ever make any less!"

"I will not be so utterly misjudged," he said, hotly. He had inherited more than his blue eyes and his Christian name from that remote Irish ancestor of his, and Aunt Sally had overtaxed his patience and almost his courtesy. "You are assuming the responsibility," he added, more quietly, "so I accept your dictum in the matter. Perhaps I am foolish. I know I am much too self-conscious. I will be as 'friendly' with Miss Douglas, if she will permit me to be, as if she had not a cent. How shall I begin, Miss Bowne? By inviting myself to dinner?"

He was laughing now, by one of those quick changes of mood which characterized him. Aunt Sally had an uncomfortable consciousness that a victory may be a good deal like a white elephant. But she resembled the Gallant Captain of the Pinafore in at least one respect: "In the stiffest sort of gale she was never known to quail." So she merely said, calmly:

"I'm glad you've come to your senses at last, but don't come out on the other side of them. What Miss Douglas wants of you is, a civil answer to a civil question, and not to be treated as if you had a patent on charity, and she'd better be careful how she infringed upon it!"

He laughed heartily, now, with good-humor quite restored.

"Have I really given her that impression?" he said. "I assure you I didn't mean to! I suppose, since you will

have me dissect myself for your benefit, Miss Bowne, that I thought her charitable phase was merely a phase; and beside, you know, or ought to know, my horror of being considered a Philantrophist—spelt with a capital P. It is very difficult not to be more charitable and amiable to oneself than to any one else! Don't you find it so? I know you do, though you may not like to admit it. I suppose I ought to be willing to let Miss Douglas help some of the people whom I'd like to help and can't, but I am afraid I am not!"

"Then it will be all the more credit to you if you do let her help them, and help her to do it!"

"Miss Bowne, are you aware that you are advocating the doctrine of works of supererogation? If I really thought it would be 'credited' to me, as a balance to certain discredits whereof I am conscious, my last hesitation would vanish."

CHAPTER XVI.

UNSATISFACTORY.

"Love comes to some with smiling eyes,
And comes with tears to some;
For some Love sings, for some Love sighs
For some Love's lips are dumb."

—PAKENHAM BEATTY.

WHATEVER the real cause for the vanishing might have been, there was certainly, after this engagement with Aunt Sally, no more visible hesitation on Neil Duncan's part about being "friendly" with Muriel. It is just possible that the shaft which really flew home was the accusation which had so stung him, and of which Aunt Sally heartily repented, from all points of view, as soon as she was left alone.

"For even if it's as true as preaching," she said to herself, "and I'm not prepared to say that it isn't, either—I'd no business to say it. I'm forever making myself think of that verse in the Psalm—'Be ye not like to horse and mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held, with bit and bridle, lest they fall upon thee'—only I've never yet been able to hold on to the bit and bridle as I should! Well, if I've done mischief, all I can do now is to look out that it doesn't spread, if I can help it, and to try not to do any more!"

But for awhile it certainly did not appear that any mischief was done. A very frank and pleasant friendship

seemed to be growing up between these two people, who, before they met, had both thought a good deal upon the same subject—a subject to which both disliked to give the name "charity," from the philological degeneracy of that much abused word. Neil Duncan had a wrong-headed prejudice against nearly all charitable organizations, which was not beneficial to Muriel, who had unconsciously imbibed a similar prejudice from her grandfather's talk upon the subject. It was this which had held her aloof from such organizations, and made her try to devise ways of helping which should have no tendency to degrade and humiliate the helped. Neither of them discerned the truth, that many of the applicants for public charity, if not most of them, have humiliated themselves before any such application is made, by degraded lives, and lost opportunities, and that what would seem to an independent spirit galling in the extreme, has no effect whatever upon them, and the other truth, that any law or public measure must consult, not the convenience of exceptional cases, but "the greatest good of the greatest number."

Neil Duncan had to a certain degree lost the first enthusiasm, and faith in immediate results, which still sustained Muriel, but, on the other hand, he had gained a better, a more permanently encouraging faith. He saw that much which appeared to be wasted and ineffectual, worked quietly, and often quite unsuspected, toward at least a small degree of good; that the harvest often came in long after there was much reason to think that the seed had died in the ground. When Muriel's faith began to be shaken by disappointments and apparent failures, his encouraged her to keep on; at first, merely because she believed what he told her, and afterward because, by slow degrees, proofs of what he asserted began to reveal themselves to her. When the inhabitants of "the Row"

grumbled at their accommodations at Hartswell, and grumbled again at the new homes which Muriel had regarded with such pride and pleasure, and confidence in their effect upon her tenants, she was for awhile deeply disheartened, and inclined to abate her efforts; but his earnest belief that, under the grumbling, was not only an increased comfort, but a carefully concealed gratitude, and that, even if there were not, she had no right to doubt the ultimate result of any honest effort, gave her the renewed courage without which she would no doubt have kept on, but which made keeping on so much more easy. And Aunt Sally, watching keenly, yet without appearing to watch, the progress of this friendship, for which she certainly was responsible, saw no reason, as yet, to do any thing but congratulate herself and them.

Muriel's liking for Marion Raymond steadily increased, as did her intimacy with May and Miss Forsythe, and though the engrossing occupation of all three of her friends made very frequent meetings with them difficult of accomplishment, she soon had no doubt of their regard for her, and pleasure, in being with her, when it was possible, and they all looked forward with very great pleasure to the meeting, and the leisure to enjoy each other, at Dovedale.

A plan which includes so many people is very apt to "fall through" to a greater or less degree before it's accomplishment, but this one, to all outward seeming, at least, was destined to be fulfilled. The month of July had been named, because of the several vacations; neither Marion nor Dick would be free before the latter part of June, and Alice's engagements ran nearly to the same time, as did May's term at the school in which she taught. Miss Forsythe's vacation was to be the latter half of that month, but she was anxious that May should not wait for her, but

should go to Dovedale early in July, when Aunt Sally and Muriel went.

"And leave you all alone for ten days or two weeks? ' said May, indignantly, "why, aunty! What do you take me for?"

"For a tired girl, in need of all the rest and country air that she can find," replied Miss Forsythe, "and I should not be alone ; I should borrow Miss Post!"

"Miss Post would not lend herself to any such nefarious scheme," said May, and there the matter dropped, for the time being. Miss Forsythe did not intend, however, that it should remain there, and took an early opportunity to see Muriel, and open her negotiation for the "loan" of Miss Post, and, of course, her little maid, for she was entirely blind, now, and more helpless than she had expected to be. Muriel hesitated in a manner which surprised Miss Forsythe. She began to speak twice, and immediately appeared to change her mind as to the construction of her sentence ; but at last she said :

"Dear Miss Agnes, I don't seem to find the right words for what I wish to say, so you must only listen to my meaning! Why can't you just close the house, and come here, on a visit to Miss Post, for the ten days or two weeks before you go to Dovedale? Indeed, I think you would, if you knew how happy it would make me, and then, I am nearly sure, we could persuade May to go with Aunt Sally and me!"

Her eager, loving face, and the warm hand-clasp which accompanied her words, gave them all the weight which she seemed to think they lacked. Miss Forsythe had no feeling which made her desire to be "coaxed," and she saw at once the reasonableness of Muriel's suggestion about May, so she accepted the invitation with as much affection as, had the case been reversed, she would have given it with, and May, under a triple attack, from her aunt, Aunt Sally

and Muriel, yielded, and began her preparations to go early in July.

Muriel was not content that the building of the row of new houses should go on without her own frequent supervision, and here, again, she often consulted Neil Duncan, for the space which she could command for each house was small, and she was anxious to make the most of it. She had employed an architect to draw the main plan, but in the smaller particulars, and more especially about the center house, which was to contain cooking and other arrangements for the comfort and convenience of all the dwellers in the row, she wished to direct the building herself. She hoped to have every thing so well advanced by the first of July as to be able to go away with an easy mind, for the journey to Dovedale was not a formidable one, and she expected to return to the field of action for a day, at least once during the visit. Miss Prudence Harley proved a valuable adviser concerning the houses, and to Muriel's great joy, consented to occupy the upper rooms of the center house and superintend the establishment ; for when Muriel asked her to take the post it was with the assurance that she should have all the help in the way of servants that she wished.

"If I can find one strong, willing girl who will do as she's told, and a good, stout boy to run errands and mind the fires, I'll not ask any thing more," said Miss Prudence, "for too much help is to the full as much trouble as too little—more, I think. And I shall see to it that the women who come there to wash and iron and bake for themselves clear up after themselves ; that will be only fair."

Lizzy and Robert Boyce were established in the two small rooms before Muriel went away, and Muriel was as much fascinated as May was with Lizzy's beauty. She was a warm-hearted, feather-headed little thing, and Muriel

could not help thinking that her mother's stern, repressive manner had been an injury to her. It was very encouraging to see her interest in and pity for Miss Post, and they were excellent friends after one evening together.

"I'll coax her out for a walk every pleasant evening, Miss Douglas," said Lizzy, earnestly, the next day, "and tell her just how every thing looks, and take her where there's flowers to smell and fountains to hear. It must be awful to be blind, and she's just as sweet and pleasant and interested in every thing as if she could see. Oh, you needn't fear but I'll be good to her! I would, even if she wasn't so lovely to me!"

Muriel was very much amused to see how Margery was beguiled by the little thing's pretty face and easy, friendly manner. The old Scotchwoman had evidently prepared herself to be very dignified and not a little instructive, for she had heard about Lizzy's "light-headedness" from several of the women in the Row, in her goings and comings with Muriel, but the beginning of her disarming was Lizzy's neatness in all her "ways" and her pride in the pretty little room, to which Muriel had added several attractions—two or three pictures, a glass bowl for flowers and a small shelf of books.

"It would be a poor story if I didn't do all Miss Douglas wishes, mother," Margery heard Lizzy say, as they were seeing Mrs. Boyce and "Frederick" off on the day when the party from the Row went to Hartswell, "after all she's put in my room. I just wish you'd had time to come and see it. She couldn't have done any more for one of her own folks."

This innocent speech made all the greater impression by contrast with the coolness manifested by so many of Muriel's beneficiaries, and when Lizzy unconsciously followed up her advantage by sounding Miss Forsythe's praises all the

way home, Margery's conquest was complete, and she said to Muriel the next morning :

"I'm thinking it was jealousy made them talk of that little girl as they did. I've seen no harm in her so far, and, on the contrary, a gread deal of good, and I doubt the mother has been too stern and strict with her. She's a hard-looking woman!"

This, from Margery, amused Muriel not a little, but she did all in her power to encourage the kindly feeling toward Lizzy, hoping much for the effect upon the child's mind and character which this visit might have.

Robert's quiet, orderly ways, and readiness to help Rogers in the short time which he spent at the house every day, gave Muriel the assurance that he would be kindly cared for.

He was delighted with the little garden, and disposed to do too much rather than too little at it, and Muriel was very glad when Lizzy beguiled Miss Post out to "see," through her eyes, how nicely he was weeding the walks and trimming the old-fashioned box borders, and Miss Post invited him to come whenever he felt like it and sit with his sister in her parlor. Miss Post had already "brightened up" wonderfully under Lizzy's care when Aunt Sally and Muriel went away, and Margery had been heard—actually heard—to laugh! Surely, even she would not call the house "dour" now.

Muriel was trying to be patient about finding "opportunities" to fill some more of those vacant rooms. She had no wish to introduce a false note into the pleasant chord which now sounded through the house, and she was learning a little of that "long patience" which is necessary for the ripening of many fruits besides "the precious fruits of the earth."

She had told Neal Duncan her wishes about filling most of

the rooms, for she had no ultra ideas which would lead her to crowd herself out, and she meant always to have at least two vacant rooms at her disposal for what Margery called "her own company." Her object in telling him was simply to ask him, should he meet with any of the cases in which a stay of a few days or weeks, during the heat of the summer, would be a blessing to the guest and do no harm to those already there, to let her know promptly, that she might give the invitation. He promised to do so, and then after a keen, curious glance at her face, which she did not see by reason of a piece of "pick-up work" with which she was occupied, he said :

"Do you know, Miss Douglas, that in spite of your matter-of-fact manner of doing it, you are doing a very strange and utterly unconventional thing?"

"Then Miss Thackeray must be mistaken," said Muriel, smiling, "when she says the chief difference between men and women is that men do foolish things sensibly and women do sensible things foolishly."

"That is merely a glittering generality; she would not be able to prove it, though it has a clever sound. But I am not to be so easily diverted from the subject in hand. I am wondering if you realize how short the time will be before your best acquaintances begin to call you 'that very peculiar Miss Douglas.' Shall you mind it very much, do you think?"

"Yes," said Muriel, slowly, and, as he could see, reluctantly, "if they do talk of me in that way, I am afraid I shall, very much."

"Then you had better take back what you have just said to me—there is yet time."

"Why should I take it back, if you please?"

"Because if you are going to distress yourself over what will inevitably be said about you when it is discovered that

you are making suppers and inviting people who can not by any possibility make suppers for you, I am afraid that you will discover subsequently that your views have been 'ultra;' that the people with whom you have filled, or nearly filled, your house, can be just as well and far more suitably accommodated elsewhere, if only you pay for the accommodation."

She looked up from her pick-up work now; the soft color in her cheeks deepened as she met his eyes, but still she spoke quietly:

"I don't know why I should feel surprised at your making such a mistake as that," she said, "for we have not known each other very long, but somehow I am. I don't suppose any body enjoys being thought weak-minded, and it seems to me the lowest depth of weak-mindedness to let one's convictions be shaken by one's inclinations."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Douglas; perhaps I was not wholly serious—but that only makes it worse, I see. But you have made an apothegm which I shall endeavor to remember. And I am quite serious in saying that I think your idea in this matter is a beautiful one. People with homes do not realize, I think, the demoralizing influence of homelessness, for no boarding-house can ever be considered a home, and a visit in such a home as this can not be without effect. I think," he added hastily, "that Miss Bowne would make a cave in a desert island seem home-like after she had spent one day—no, half a day, there; don't you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Muriel, warmly, and only too thankful to escape further discussion of herself and her plans just then; "I can never be sufficiently grateful to her for coming to me; she has done more for me than I can ever repay, or perhaps even realize. I am frequently attacked by the wish that she might have a chance at more people.

She seems to have a peculiar power, not for governing, but for suggesting."

"She has, she has, indeed," he replied, with a sudden earnestness which made Muriel look up again. "But I sometimes wonder," he added, in his usual tones, "how far it is safe, or even allowable, to offer suggestions to other people about the conduct of their lives. When it comes to advice, I am almost convinced that nobody had better, under any circumstances, give advice to any body!"

"And you do not call that a glittering generality?"

"No; I assert fearlessly that I do not. Call it a solemn warning if you like, and beware how you advise any body to any thing, until these modern psychologists have perfected their discoveries and we can look into our neighbors' minds. And even then, we shall only be looking at them from the outside."

"That is a most disagreeable suggestion. I can not conceive the possibility of any body's willingness to have his mind looked into, even from the outside."

"I cannot, either. Let us hope that they will not succeed until some time after our death!"

"If nobody is, under any circumstances, to advise any body, more than half the charm of the discovery will be lost. Must you go? I am expecting Aunt Sally every moment, and she is always disappointed when she misses one of your visits. You ought to feel highly honored by your place in her regard."

"I do, but I fear I must go, notwithstanding. What was the apothegm, Miss Douglas? 'It is the lowest depth of weak-mindedness to let one's convictions be shaken by one's inclinations?' I shall try to remember it. Good-by."

"You were not at all agreeable to-day, Mr. Duncan," soliloquized Muriel, as she heard the hall door close upon

him, "and I am not at all sorry, on my own account, to have you go. There are times when it strikes me that it would give you great pleasure, if you were not restrained by principle, to be extremely unpleasant, and this was one of them. I don't think Aunt Sally's loss is irreparable, this time."

She was very sensitive to any thing like ridicule, and she had an idea that Mr. Duncan had come very near ridiculing her, if he had not quite done it, when he accused her of making an "apothegm," and returned to the charge at the last moment. Perhaps he was covertly testing the strength of her own faith in her apothegm? Well, let him test it. It could stand a much more severe strain than any to which he had yet subjected it, she hoped!

If she had only known how far, in his heart of hearts, he was from ridiculing her! He had ceased, for many days to feel the shadowy apprehension which had made Aunt Sally's taunt so peculiarly stinging and unbearable, and into its place had been gradually stealing a fear—not shadowy or vague, but very real—that if he allowed himself much more of this companionship—so innocently "friendly" on her side, so utterly unconscious of any thing deeper on his—he should say something which would, in his own eyes and probably in hers also, degrade him forever. For what could she, what could any one think, should a man in his position ask a woman in hers to marry him? He fancied the most good-natured, the most charitable of his friends, saying amiably: "Yes, he's done a very good thing for himself. Nothing to do but walk in and hang up his hat. He's a lucky fellow!"

He had heard such talk; he had even joined in it. Could he make it possible that it should be applied to him; that her name would be coupled with that of a man who would be supposed to marry her chiefly, if not wholly, for

the worldly advantages which such a marriage would undoubtedly give him?

But where was the will-power of which he had always been so complaisantly conscious? Surely, he need not cut himself off from what was fast becoming the chief charm of living, when all that was needed was a little—no, a great deal! of resolution? It would be very different if there were the smallest hint or token that she was, however unconsciously, beginning to—he would not finish the sentence; he felt his face flush hotly. He had been stung, only a few days before by noticing how exactly the same was her gentle courtesy to Dick, to the two members of the glee club, whom she saw most often, and to himself; he even fancied that her manner to him was a shade less cordial than her manner to the others, and in this he was right, for her friendship with Dick and the "other boys" was unshadowed by the small vexations which Neil Duncan's words often caused her. But he would not, he resolved, do any thing so sudden as to arouse her wonder. Surely, he might govern both looks and words for the short space of time in which she saw and heard them, so that she should suspect nothing of what he was feeling and thinking; and in time, perhaps, he would be in a position which would make it possible for him to speak. His employers thought well of him, and he had a very reasonable hope of steady advancement. His salary had just been raised to a thousand dollars, and, if she were only poor and friendless, he should not hesitate a moment to ask her to marry him on that. So he would temporize—and he scouted the idea which thrust itself forward with disagreeable pertinacity, that his only real safety lay in flight from temptation.

A discussion which they had recently held about a novel, and which he happened to recall just now, served to strengthen him in his latest resolution, if a deliberate yield-

ing to an inclination can be called by that name. It was one of the too-numerous stories in which the heroine is represented as the silent and saintly victim of a love for a man who has never manifested more than a very ordinary liking for her, and Muriel had been roused out of her usual quietness of demeanor by his half-laughing defence of the idea.

"And, pray, why not?" he said. "What is there to hinder a woman from saying to herself, with 'Gentle Alice Brown,' 'I think I could be happy with a gentleman like you?' She need not say it aloud because she thinks it, and I never could see—"

"You are not in earnest, I know you are not," interrupted Muriel, almost angrily. "The very fact, that everyone recognizes, that she may not, must not say it, is enough. I wish you would not say such things, even in jest. I don't believe you would, if you knew how they offend me."

"I will not, then. But, seriously, Miss Douglas, does it not strike you as slightly paradoxical that a woman who has occupied this lofty position, who has been deaf and blind, as it were, until a man says: 'Will you marry me?' should discover, as if the proposal were an electric light, that she loves him enough to say yes?"

"It's a good deal like making soap," struck in Aunt Sally; she had kept her oar out as long as she possibly could, and she saw, besides, that Muriel's genuine vexation put her at a disadvantage in the discussion. "Two of the 'elements,' as I suppose I ought to call 'em, since I'm in Boston, wouldn't mix if you stirred them around in the same kettle till doomsday, but you just put in the third, and it's done in a minute! And the third is the proposal!"

Even Muriel joined in the laugh, which Aunt Sally frankly started herself, and Neil Duncan said: "I shall insert a new reading in my Tennyson. I know now that what

he really meant to say was : ' A voice said faintly, Is there any soap ? ' "

And Muriel, instead of giving him the reproachful glance which he had expected, said brightly :

" Yes ; and it throws light upon that bit of hopeless nonsense, as it has been irreverently called, which begins : ' So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage-leaf to make an apple-pie.' We can see now distinctly why ' he died ' when ' the great she-bear ' said, tragically, ' What, no soap ! ' "

" What in this earthly world, as Ann says, are you talking about ? " inquired Aunt Sally, in a thoroughly-puzzled voice ; whereupon Muriel glibly repeated the hopeless nonsense, and then immediately began to talk of something else.

There was only a very civil and friendly regret in Muriel's manner when she bade Neil Duncan good-by the evening before she and Aunt Sally were to go to Dovedale, for, while she was more and more impressed, as she came to know him better, with the strength of his character, and the beauty of his self-denying and busy life, unspoiled by any desire for praise, or even recognition, she was so often puzzled and annoyed by his tendency to ridicule nearly every thing, that her pleasure in talking to him was too nearly counterbalanced. He had more than half expected that Miss Bowne would invite him to come and see them during the month of their absence, and had framed a sufficient excuse for declining the invitation, by way of reply. This being the case, he had a perfect right to accuse himself of being " utterly senseless " for feeling disappointed when no such invitation was given ; but it was so unlike Miss Bowne, under the circumstances, to refrain from giving it, that he felt, also, a sort of alarm. Could she by any possibility have penetrated to the real state of his feelings ?

But it was her own feelings, and no suspicion of his, which

had kept her from asking him to come and see them at Dovedale. She had determined to take no more such responsibilities as she had incurred when she insisted upon his being "friendly" to Muriel; there was quite enough of a chance that the horse was not stolen to make it worth while to lock the stable-door! She did ask him, however, if he was to have any vacation that year, and he said yes, two weeks in August, and he and one of his fellow-clerks were going to walk away all the first week and then walk back all the second!

Aunt Sally glanced over the tall, powerful frame, which looked incapable of weariness or disease, and remarked:

"I suppose that is your idea of resting? Well, I don't believe it will hurt you!"

He lingered still, mentally calling himself all sorts of hard names, because he knew he was waiting for some word or look from Muriel which should express a little real regret; a little hope of meeting him again. But none came, and he said good-by at last, and Aunt Sally began, as soon as he was gone, "to talk of many things," so that the remark which Muriel was about to make concerning him was not made, but it would, perhaps, have done Miss Bowne good to have known that it was:

"I think Mr. Duncan was a little stupid to-day, aunty! I was not so sorry to bid him good-by for a month as I thought I should be!"

A delight for which she almost reproached herself took possession of Muriel as she reached the station nearest Dovedale, and saw the friendly faces beaming at her from the large wagon, and Dick, still more beaming, at the door of the car; and it seemed to increase, rather than diminish, with every day of her stay. The affectionate care and solicitude which surrounded her were so unobtrusive, and left her so untrammeled, that she felt at home directly and

ceased to wonder at Dick's irrepressible conflict with himself when he contrasted his real home with the flat ; indeed she thought the wonder was that he submitted so patiently, and made no parade of his submission. He had showed her every nook and corner of the farm, and taken her on most of his favorite "tramps" before the Craigs and Osbornes arrived. After that, it seemed to Muriel, the whole family lived out of doors, coming into the house only to eat and sleep, and not always for the former purpose, for what with pic-nics, and teas and breakfasts on the broad veranda, the dining-room was almost as much slighted as the parlor was. Her frequent attacks of self-reproach for enjoying that for which, or the like of which, such multitudes were suffering, were always routed by Aunt Sally as being "morbid."

"After you've done all you can for other people, my dear," said the old lady, "or while you're doing it, there's no reason why you should refuse the share of enjoyment that falls in your own way honestly, and without your taking any unfair means to get it. To Miss Post and to Lizzie and her brother, a share of your home is quite as delightful as what you're receiving here is to you ; and after your experience with those people in the Row, and their more than indifference to a home in the country, you ought to be able to understand that what is one man's meat is often another man's poison ! "

Muriel insisted upon going to Boston every Saturday, for an hour at the ware-house, and as there was at this time of year a fast return train at five o'clock, and she pledged herself to take it, she was not seriously remonstrated with. Dick quietly announced his intention to go with her, and this pleased her very much. She had said nothing of the arrangement to Neil Duncan, partly because she never knew what form his comments on her designs would take,

and partly because she did not wish him to think she was even remotely suggesting that, even if he wished, he could see her at these times. She and Dick armed themselves with huge bouquets of daisies and clover every Saturday, and with smaller ones of garden-flowers, and from the first they gave, as they went along to all the ragged children they met, and to many others not ragged, whose longing eyes said the "*please* give me a flower," as plainly as it was spoken by the little ragamuffins who did not hesitate to put it into words. She managed, by going up on an early train, to spend an hour with Miss Post and Margery, and was greatly cheered by the former's account of Lizzy and Robert ; for, even making allowance for the rose-colored spectacles through which Miss Post, despite her blindness, continued to see, it was evident from the facts she told, and from Margery's account as well, that they were doing all in their power to testify to their gratitude and content. And, besides this, Lizzy heard once a week from her mother, and as she always read her letter to Miss Post at least once, Muriel heard a good many things about the daily life of her Hartswell colony which she could have heard in no other way, and she was surprised to learn from various indications, rather than any distinct testimony, how thoroughly they were enjoying themselves ! The chief boast of all of them seemed to be how much they were "putting up" for next winter, and there was always something about "Miss Prudence ;" either she had invited one or another to tea at the farm, or she had showed them some new way of putting up something, or told them of something else they could put up.

"She is undermining her own business terribly, Miss Post, isn't she ?" said Muriel, laughing, after hearing the main facts of one of these letters ; "its a very good thing she will be in a salaried position next winter, and able to eat and give away all that she can not sell."

Several times Muriel had letters from Miss Prudence herself, cheerful, sensible letters like her talk, praising the women in the little colony for their industry and readiness to learn new ways, and always ending with a pæan that she was not obliged to live there "all the year round!"

"Just imagine, aunty," said Muriel, after reading one of these documents to Aunt Sally, "any body's really *preferring* that stived-up little city street, with the warehouse behind it, and others almost as near in front, to that lovely country about Hartswell! It seems actually impossible!"

"It isn't the street she prefers, my dear; it's the home she's grown accustomed to, and the business she's fitted for, and the people she likes to meet, and the feeling of life and stir only a few blocks off. I can understand how the country, to born and bred city folks, might seem just as lonesome and dreary as the city does to real country folks."

It was about the middle of July, after Miss Forsythe had come, and when Aunt Sally and Muriel were thinking with regret that their visit at Dovedale was more than half over, that Muriel, looking over a daily paper which Jack Osborne had handed her, exclaimed suddenly:

"Why aunty! That nice old Mr. Sellers, who owned the warehouse, is dead; he died yesterday! I've been wondering why he has not been to the Row for so long, and now it says, 'after a lingering illness.' How sorry I am that I did not know he was ill!"

And in another part of the same paper, a few days later, she came upon a notice which filled her with excitement. Mr. Sellers's estate, a large one, the paper said, was to be settled immediately, and the warehouse was to be sold!

CHAPTER XVII.

AND LAST.

"Labor is mortal and fades away,
But Love shall triumph in perfect day;
Labor may wither beneath the sod,
But Love lives ever, for Love is God."

IT did not take Muriel long to conclude that here was an "opportunity" which she could not afford to miss. Her one room at the warehouse was already overcrowded, and she felt sure that, with the first approach of cold weather, there would be many more applicants for admission. Other projects which had flitted before her mind at different times could be carried out if she had such a building as the warehouse at her disposal; a gymnasium, a cooking and sewing room, a kindergarten for the very little children, and a day-nursery, the need for which she guessed by the condition of several which she had recently visited. Aunt Sally and she kept working each other up with suggestions of the possibilities which that building held, until in a day or two all the others were laughing at them, and uttering mildly sarcastic wonders that they had never discovered a structure of such gigantic proportions as this must be, from all it was destined to contain, right in the heart of Boston!

"Oh, 'you may laugh,' as Aunt Sally says!" answered Muriel, gayly, "but you will find that with judicious management, it will hold every single thing we have planned,

and possibly one or two more! And when I go up on Saturday morning, I am going straight to Mr. Keith's office to get his consent and put the matter in train! It is high time to begin, if it is to be ready before cold weather."

She was fortunate in finding the "senior partner" in, and alone, and though he listened with the kindest attention, as she unfolded her plans to him, she fancied that his face grew very serious, and he did not reply for several minutes to the eager question with which she concluded:

"Do you think I might do it, dear Mr. Keith?"

"The property is valuable in itself," he said, at last, "and I see no risk in buying it, if it should sell for any thing like a reasonable price, for it is pretty sure to rise in value, and very sure, I think, not to decline. But do you know, my dear young lady, that you are planning out an enterprise which will, for at least a year to come, until it is fairly manned, so to speak, and under way, absorb nearly all your time, if you mean to do it justice? And have you reflected that the amount of money which it will require could be, perhaps, bestowed upon some of the many excellent charities which are already organized and in working order?"

He did not know how those two innocent words, "organized charities" fixed her purpose, if that were possible, even more firmly and made her feel willing to undertake the labor and self-denial which she knew it must and would involve.

"It is not just the money that I want to give," she said. "I think it is, myself, too. Perhaps I am wrong; I know I am prejudiced, but indeed, I think a help, not a charity, managed by people, not by a board, may do some things which the best organizations must in their very nature fail to reach. I have thought so much about it. And I have seen what a dreadful thing money can be, Mr. Keith. I pray every day that whenever it begins to be that to me it

may be taken from me, or I from it. So you will not hinder me about this, my kind friend?"

She laid her hand upon his and looked up at him with pleading eyes.

"My dear, I will not!" he said, as earnestly as she had spoken herself. "I only wish you to count the cost, not in money, but in other things, and to be sure that you would not tire of this undertaking, and draw back, for that I think would do far more harm than if you were never to attempt it. But I think you are in earnest, and I feel very well assured that this is just such a thing as your grandfather, when he was dying, would have approved and sanctioned. You have, so far, calculating by what you have drawn per month, lived within your income, and I have no fear that you will ever wish to increase your expenses by any thing done merely for outward show. Beside, your income, so far as I can see, will steadily increase for some years to come. If I can help you in any way about this enterprise, I hope you will have sufficient confidence in me to command my help. I have withdrawn myself of late from any very active participation in the business of the firm; my sons are quite able to manage it, and I am beginning to feel like the old man that I am; but to your affairs I hope to attend so long as my mind does not share in the feebleness of my body."

"How kind, how good you are to me!" said Muriel, gratefully. "I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Keith, just for understanding! You will let me know as soon as my warehouse is really mine?"

"I will, indeed. And don't cut short your visit in the country, my dear. You are looking much better and stronger for your absence, and to care for others effectually, you must take all reasonable care of yourself."

"All reasonable care!" said Muriel to herself, as she

walked rapidly away, for she had staid longer than she had expected to stay, and had only time for a hurried call on Miss Post. "It is very hard, I think, to draw the line between reasonable care of oneself, and self-absorption! And yet he must be right; no skillful workman will neglect the care of his machinery or tools."

So while she chatted with Miss Post, she ate the lunch which Margery joyfully brought her, with the remark:

"If I'd known you'd be asking for lunch at five minutes' notice like this, Miss Muriel, I'd have had something ready for you, besides cold rolls and milk!"

Muriel had hard work to keep her thoughts where they belonged that afternoon, and to wait until she and Dick had started for the train, to tell him about her interview with Mr. Keith. He fairly rivaled Aunt Sally in plans and suggestions as they whirled along, and they were both very much surprised when the conductor shouted:

"All out for Dovedale!"

The all included Stephen Craig, who had been in Boston since the day before. They had not happened to see each other either at the Boston station, or on the train, and he was glad, he said, to find that they had not come by an earlier train, and so left him to walk home. It struck Muriel at once that he looked unusually serious, and as they drove along he mentioned the reason—he had heard, upon good authority, that day, that a savings-bank in which he knew that Miss Forsythe had recently deposited the small sum which had been slowly and laboriously laid by against that possible "rainy-day" for which every one looks more or less, had failed disgracefully, as well as disastrously, and he had also heard, although this he did not feel called upon to mention just then, that a very promising stock-company, in which he had been induced to invest the proceeds of several of his recent sales of pictures, had gone totally to

pieces ; the only consolation to the stock holders being that the same figure—o—stood alike for assets and liabilities !

Both Muriel and Dick were distressed by the news of Miss Forsythe's loss, and Muriel began at once to try to devise some scheme for making it good, without wounding the pride of that independent woman. With May alone, she was pretty sure she could have managed "somehow," but about May's aunt she did not feel so much confidence in this respect. This bit of bad news damped the exuberant joy with which she was bringing her good news to Aunt Sally and her other friends, and she quite agreed with Stephen that it was unneccessary to tell the former that evening.

"It will keep perfectly well until morning," he said, adding mentally, "and so will my latest intelligence for Fanny," and they all three tried to throw off the depression which they felt, and be at least as cheerful as usual.

That same evening, as Neil Duncan was returning from one of the long tramps which helped to keep up his vigor of mind and body, and was still in the outskirts of the city, where the lights were not so numerous as in the more thickly-settled parts, he found himself walking just behind two young men, who, arm-in-arm, and keeping step, kept just far enough ahead of him to prevent him from trying to pass them.

He was paying no attention to their talk, when the name of "Miss Douglas," distinctly uttered by one of them, caught his ear, and he heard the other reply :

"Yes, it's a confounded shame ! Every cent, they say, and though, I suppose, she still owns the house, it won't do her much good, under the circumstances, unless she can sell it."

"I'm sorry, very sorry," resumed the first speaker ; "she's a thoroughly nice girl, and so, meaning no disrespect to her, is the aunt too, I imagine. I wonder what they will do ?"

They turned down a side street before the other replied, and Neil Duncan, walking slowly on, tried to quiet his whirling brain and think. It never crossed his mind that the "Miss Douglas" of whom they spoke could be any other than Muriel, for he had remembered, almost immediately, seeing in that morning's paper a notice of the failure of the stock company, in which Stephen's money had been lost, and a statement that "several of our best families, who had been induced, by plausible misrepresentations, to invest in this concern, would probably suffer more than the rascals who had fleeced them."

And he knew absolutely nothing of Muriel's affairs. A very slight knowledge of them would have led him to suspect that he must be mistaken, for any one who knew the elder Mr. Keith would also know that Muriel would never have been counseled by him to invest all her money in any one concern.

One thought was most prominent, as his mind gradually cleared and recovered it's balance ; he must see her at once, before she had had time to be distressed and uneasy ; he must win her promise, even if she did not and could not love him now, to give him a chance to make her ! It seemed to him that he was treading on air, so buoyant did he feel. To be free to speak, to tell her something of what he had lately been thinking and feeling, was so much, so very much ! Surely it would be his own fault, now, if he could not win her. He stopped at the first ticket-office to which he came, to inquire about trains. It was still early ; it could not yet be nine o'clock he thought ; perhaps he might go to-night, and so be there ready to see her at the first possible moment in the morning. But he found that the last train which stopped at the Dovedale station had been gone for some hours, and that there would only be two each way the next day, which would be Sunday.

So there was nothing for it but to wait, and as it seemed more possible to wait while he was in motion, he started forth once more, walked out well into the country, and reached his lodgings near midnight, so completely tired that he fell asleep as soon as he was in bed, instead of lying awake and planning his campaign, as he had confidently expected to do. But the fear which had haunted him, that he would sleep too late for the early morning train, woke him at dawn, and he was at the station half an hour too soon. And here, by a co-incidence, another accidentally-heard scrap of talk confirmed—if it needed confirmation—his mistaken belief. It was just a few words, as before, about "Miss Douglas and her aunt," and, "every thing gone but the house, you know."

He caught himself wishing that the house had gone, too, for it represented more money than he wished her to own.

"But very probably there may be liabilities," he reflected, and this happy thought consoled him and made him resolve not to let the house stand in the way, now that the far more formidable obstacle of the fortune was gone.

He thought the country had never looked so lovely, and he was struck by the number of pleasant-looking people on the train. And then, suddenly, as he left the station and started up the long country road, not much more than a lane, which the ticket agent had pointed out to him, he began to reflect upon the strangeness of his unlooked-for descent upon a family which he knew very pleasantly, but not very intimately, in a place so far from his usual haunts that his coming could not be accidental. And, "to cap the climax," as Aunt Sally would have said, they would, in all probability, just be sitting down to dinner.

And as soon as he thought of dinner he became conscious that he was ravenously hungry. He had eaten no supper the night before, his breakfast had been hurried

through his fear of missing the train, and he dared not think of the dinner he might eat, even though the lady of his dreams should be sitting directly opposite. The one step between the sublime and the ridiculous had been taken, and although his resolve was just as firm and his love as strong, he began to realize that he had strayed a good way from "the kingdom of common sense." So he stopped at the first farm-house and asked if there were any tavern or boarding-house near by where he could get his dinner. None nearer than a good three miles, the farmer assured him; but they had just finished dinner; there was a plenty left, and—

"Come right in and sit down, young man," said the farmer, heartily, "and I reckon mother can scratch you up enough to satisfy you. Mother!" he shouted through the open door.

Whereupon, Mother, a pleasant-faced woman, some years younger than her husband, came forward and confirmed the reckoning, and immediately proceeded to verify it. They would accept no payment, and he departed in receipt of a cordial invitation to "drop in again if he happened to be passin'," and went on his way much refreshed and tranquilized, and very thankful that he had not signalized his arrival at Dovedale by eating that dinner!

He knew the house at once as he approached it, from a sketch which Muriel had shown him. There was a clump of hazel bnshes near the entrance gate, in the midst of which a bench had been placed, which bench was almost entirely screened from view, but at one point in the winding carriage road it was visible. And on this bench, with a book in her lap, which she was not even pretending to read, sat Muriel, quite alone. He walked a little farther, and then approached the place over the soft, thick grass from the

side, so that she did not see him until he spoke. She started up, but immediately sat down again, and save for a heightening of the color in her cheeks, seemed, as he rather dismally reflected, entirely composed.

"I don't wonder you were glad you knew some people in the country who would like to see you," she said, as soon as he was seated on the other end of the right-angled bench, and thus nearly facing her. "I was just pitying all the poor people who are shut up in cities to-day. Aunt Sally and all of them will be so glad to see you. I am very sorry that I am the sole representative just now. They have, every one of them except Alice, walked to church, two miles away. She is in her room with a headache, poor girl, and I didn't feel like going, so they were kind enough to leave me. That is one of the charms of this place—one is absolutely free to pursue happiness in one's own way."

He looked at her in astonishment. He had never heard her talk so fast and fluently before, and he did not know how plainly his purpose was written on his face. But some instinct made him know that she had divined and was trying to avert it, and he only waited for her to pause. Then he stood up before her and tried to speak, but every word that had been in his mind vanished as if by some wicked act of magic. With a reverent touch he laid one hand over her two, which were clasped upon her book.

"Muriel!"

He could not have added another word if all his hopes had depended on it, so he waited, and presently

"The silence drew her face up like a call,"

and their eyes met. She did not take her hands, which were trembling very much, away from his, but she said, softly:

"I can not pretend not to understand you. I think—I

almost know—that I am glad, but you must wait a little. I must think—you have taken me so by surprise."

It was the often-repeated lesson of life again :

"Worse than our hopes, but better than our fears."

He knew now that he had hoped for far more than this, and that he had feared far more, too.

He drew his hand away.

"You shall wait," he said, very gently. "I did not mean to startle you, dear. I will try to be patient. But can you understand that lately, since I have loved you and dared not tell you so, I have belied myself to you ?"

She thought a moment, and then her face brightened. All that had puzzled and annoyed her seemed explained. But why, she wondered, had he not dared, since he did not seem at all afraid of daring now ?

One of his fears had been that the sudden change in her fortunes would cause her to refuse him in such a way that he could not be sufficiently certain of her reason to urge his suit, and he blessed her for the evident unconsciousness of every consideration of this sort which had marked her answer. The more he thought in the sweet summer silence, the more he hoped ; for over her face, which he was intently watching, the thoughts of her heart were sending fleeting expressions, like cloud-shadows and sunshine over a landscape. Then a sudden panic seized him ; he could not face even the friendliest faces just now, while the balance still trembled uncertainly, in spite of all his hopes.

"I must go," he said, hurriedly ; "I am going back this evening, and I can't—oh, Muriel, you will try not to keep me long in this fear? If you only knew—if I could only make you understand—it will be torment, when I am away from you. Be merciful."

"I am sorry," she said, and her eyes filled with sudden

tears. "I wish I could say at once that I could be quite certain. I ought to love you so much, to be able to say—to promise—"

She looked up beseechingly. No thought of coquetting with him, of testing his feelings, prompted that look; she was in honest doubt of her own, and yet he felt a joyful thrill as he looked at her quivering face—the statue was beginning to throb with the woman's heart.

"I will write," she said. "I can tell you better what I mean. But I know this much—I am very glad you love me."

"Then—" he began eagerly, but he stopped himself; he would not be ungenerous.

"Good-by," he said, "good-by, Muriel," and he held the hand she gave him fast in both his own for a moment, and then he was gone, and she wondered if the whole thing had been a dream.

And on his way to his lodging, after he reached Boston, he met a friend, who, in the course of conversation, told him all about the failure of the bank, and of the stock-company, and how people were mixing them up, and how among those "hit" by the former were Miss Forsythe and her niece, Miss Douglas; and here Neil Duncan gave a sudden exclamation, and said:

"*That* Miss Douglas? I understood that it was the other—her cousin!"

"Oh, no, my dear fellow," and his companion laughed. "You're betraying your lamentable ignorance. Old Keith, the lawyer, has charge of Miss *Muriel* Douglas's affairs, and although he seems to be letting her do a good many absurd things with her income, you may depend he keeps his grip on the principal. And a very pretty principal it is, I understand; enough to float a much more unattractive girl than the temporarily-philanthropic Miss Douglas."

Neil Duncan set his teeth hard, and managed to escape from his loquacious friend without saying any thing besides "Good-evening."

But a roaring like the sound of the sea was in his brain, and it seemed to him he must be walking unsteadily. So this was what would be said? A penniless man, a mere fortune-hunter, had made a pretense of helping her with her "temporary" philanthropy, of falling in with her views, that he might win, incidentally, her love, and, through it, her fortune.

And so, while Muriel, with a growing sense of happiness, of security in a blessing all her own, was shyly telling Aunt Sally something of what had happened, and framing in her mind the letter she should write next day, and dreaming those waking dreams which we can mold to our will, unlike the arbitrary dreams of sleep, the lover of whom she dreamed was nerving himself to write to her that night; to frame a note which should accept her hesitation as refusal. He did not stop to analyze his motives. There is a wrong side to every nature, even the noblest, and the wrong side of his was an over-sensitiveness to, a selfish regard for, the opinions of the few people for whom he cared, while, as so often happens, he was held to be utterly indifferent to any judgment save his own. And, arguing from many remarks on more or less similar cases, which he had heard at one time and another, even his most intimate friends, the ones who knew him best, would say things not only of, but to him which would make him wince. And what could even she think?

"And she does not love me, yet," he said to himself, trying to take comfort from the thought, and smiling forlornly as he remembered Aunt Sally's brisk dictum, "It's like making soap!"

There had been no swift response and surrender here.

He would be in time to prevent any mischief to any one but himself.

As the summer dawn was breaking, fresh and sweet, even within city limits, he wrote his letter ; but it suited him so ill that he would not post it. He would keep it in his pocket, and try once more in the course of the day, he thought. He did not believe that she would write for several days.

The head of the large wholesale house in which he was employed came to him that day, with an offer which was not the sudden and surprising thing which it seemed to him, but was the result of a good deal of consultation and thought among the older members. They wanted a man whom they could trust, to go to India, and stay there for a year ; and although, as they agreed, Neil Duncan was not in all respects the man they wanted, in the most essential points he was. The offer was, double his present salary and all his expenses paid, for the part of the country to which they wished to send him was not an especially healthful one, and they were willing, as they said, to make it "worth his while" to go.

They were a good deal surprised by his immediate and unquestioning acceptance of the offer, and the head of the firm remarked that there was no need for such haste ; that they expected him to take a day or two in which to make up his mind. Had he no relatives or friends whom he would wish to consult ?

"I have no near relatives living," he replied, gravely, almost abruptly, "and the distant ones are distant in both senses of the word. I can give you my answer as well now as to-morrow or next day. I was wishing for a change, and I shall be very willing to go."

"And how soon could you be ready ?" asked his employer, next.

"To-morrow—no, the next day," he answered, absently, and not noticing the surprised glances which passed between them.

"We had thought," said another member of the firm, "of suggesting the steamer which leaves New York next Saturday. You will, of course, go by the overland route; as this is only Monday, that will give you two days more than you require, for it will be well for you to be in New York by Friday evening. Would this arrangement suit you?"

"Perfectly," he replied, and, afraid that his manner would cause them to doubt the wisdom of their choice, he roused himself, by great effort, questioned them intelligently as to the duties he was to assume, made notes of their replies, and was told that he would receive written instructions before his departure, and, from time to time, after he reached his destination.

There was some little comment, after he left the office, upon the peculiar manner in which he had received their offer, and his apparent eagerness to lose no time in getting away.

"I don't exactly like it," said one of the younger men. "It looks to me very much as if he were in some kind of a scrape, and not only glad of the opportunity to go, but anxious to be quick about it. I am not sure that we were wise to clinch the business so promptly."

"I do not think you need be uneasy," replied the head of the firm. "I have been watching that young man more carefully than he knows, for some time, and I have entire confidence in his integrity, which, in this case, is really the chief requisite. He will have plenty of intelligent help about the details of the business, and as for his eagerness to get away, most young fellows would be glad enough of the chance, danger and all. And if he is in any sort of a scrape, it's probably some fuss with a girl—he's a good-

looking youngster, very—and that is no earthly concern of ours."

And so, in an hour's time, it was settled, and Neil Duncan, instead of trying to rewrite his letter, added a postscript, stating briefly that he had just accepted a business-commission which would oblige him to sail for India the following Saturday, sealed the letter, and posted it, without rereading it, for he was afraid that, should he read it again, he would destroy it, and make the vain and hopeless attempt to write something more to his mind.

Muriel had meant to write to him on Monday ; to tell him of the growing happiness in her heart, the growing certainty that she loved him ; but she had the feeling which sometimes comes in a morning dream, that if she spoke the dream might vanish.

"I will wait till to-morrow," she whispered to herself, "and perhaps I shall be even surer, then."

She had spoken to no one but Aunt Sally, and the state of beaming delight which Miss Bowne could not conceal, while it drew attention to her, aroused no suspicion as to its cause, for no one knew any thing of Neil Duncan's visit.

His letter came to Muriel the next evening, just as the family was going to tea. She had seen his writing before, and knew it at once, so she put the letter in her pocket, and, before the long summer twilight had quite faded, she managed to escape alone to the bench among the hazel-bushes, for she wished to read it there. And there, an hour later, Aunt Sally found her. It was nearly dark, and the dew was heavy on the grass, but Muriel had no wrap, and was shivering in her thin summer dress. Aunt Sally was indignant, and was about to give her indignation words, when something in Muriel's attitude and her perfect silence changed the words into :

"My child, what is the matter?"

"I don't know—I don't understand," she answered, in dreamy, puzzled tones. "There must be some mistake—some very strange mistake."

"Come straight into the house, before you catch your death of cold; come up to my room, and tell me there," said Aunt Sally, putting her arm about Muriel, and almost lifting her from the bench.

They reached the house, and the up-stairs room, without meeting any one. A lamp was burning on the candlestand and Muriel held out the letter, saying:

"Please read it, aunty; please tell me what you think it means," and Aunt Sally took it, and read:

"My Dear Miss Douglas.

"When I saw you yesterday, I was under a delusion, which I can not possibly explain, but the knowledge of which makes me deeply thankful that you could not give me the answer for which I then wished. I ask you now to forget all that I said, and to be again the friend whom I value, permitting me to be always your friend.

"Neil Duncan.

"I sail for India on Saturday next, by request of the firm in whose employ I am, and on their business. I cannot tell when I shall return.

"God bless and keep you."

The last line was added in a hurried scrawl, different from the neat writing of the rest of the note, and was blotted by the envelope.

Aunt Sally dropped into the nearest chair, as soon as she had finished reading this extraordinary document, and for once could find no adequate words in which to clothe her thoughts. But Muriel's beseeching, questioning look made her feel that she must say something, so she gasped out:

"Of course there is a mistake. Somebody has told him

some extraordinary thing. It will all be set right before he goes away, and then may be he will not go at all. You hadn't written to him since you saw him, had you, dear?"

"No; I was waiting till to-morrow," replied Muriel, with whom utter perplexity seemed, as yet, to preclude any deeper feeling. "I meant to write to-morrow, but I can not now; I must wait, now, until he tells me what he means. I don't understand."

"Well, we will sleep on it, and see if we can think of a way out in the morning—things always seem clearer then," said Aunt Sally, with assumed cheerfulness; and she helped Muriel, who did not seem to think of resisting, to undress, and tucked her up in bed, without any more words. But when she went to take away the lamp, Muriel said gently:

"Please leave me the light, aunty; and please shut the door between our rooms."

Aunt Sally complied with these requests, and then nerved herself to go down to the parlor, intent on averting remark or suspicion.

She was questioned at once, as she expected to be, as to where Muriel was, and she replied promptly:

"The child didn't seem well. I'm afraid she has caught cold, and I made her come up stairs and go to bed."

There was nothing out of the common in this, and while they expressed regrets, they asked no more questions, and Aunt Sally silently prayed to be forgiven for the untruth which she felt that she had told, although all she said had been strictly true. It was difficult for her to join in the talk while she was racking her brain for a reason for Neil Duncan's extraordinary conduct, and she was thankful when the circle broke up for the night. But something Jack Osborne was saying to Rose, as they stood at the window looking out at the moonlight, arrested her attention, and made her stop to question him.

"It's the most astonishing thing, Rosamundi," he said, "how people manage to get things twisted! I met two or three people in Boston to-day, who insisted that Miss *Muriel* Douglas had lost every cent of her money through the explosion of that stock company which went up just about when the bank did. And even when I mentioned, as a suggestion that I might possibly know what I was talking about, that both the Misses Douglas were visiting at my summer residence—I always call Dovedale that, it sounds so well—I don't think they quite believed me!"

"Were any of them people I know?" asked Aunt Sally, with what struck Jack as singular interest in the matter.

"No, ma'am," he replied; "but if there's any thing you'd like me to do to them for you, I shall be most happy!"

"I'll let you know if I think of any thing!" she said. "When does that train leave that you took this morning? At half-past eight?"

"It leaves the Dovedale station at that time; do be more accurate, Aunt Sally!"

"I'll be accurate enough in the morning, if you'll be ready to drive me to that train; I've got to go to Boston, to-morrow, on business."

"Oh, Aunty!" said Rose, "isn't it any thing one of us can attend to for you; it's going to be so warm to-morrow."

"Thank you, my dear, but it's something that I must do myself. Will you take me to the train, Jack?"

"Certainly I will, if you must go, Aunt Sally; but I wish your business would keep for cooler weather."

"So do I, but it won't. Good-night."

"I wouldn't say any thing more to her about it, if I were you, Jack," said Rose. "I thought she seemed afraid we would question her."

"I will talk about the weather all the way to the station. But I wish she'd tell, and let us help her."

When Miss Bowne reached Boston, she went straight to the house where Neil Duncan was employed and asked to see him. She happened to speak to a civil clerk, and so was told that he was about to go to India for the firm, that he was busy with his preparations, and would not be at the office any more. She thanked her informant, and turned away ; muttering to herself,

"There's one chance in ten, and I'll take it !"

She went next to his lodgings, congratulating herself that she knew the street and number. Yes, he was in, the servant said, but very busy packing, and she didn't think——

"You go tell him that a lady—an old lady—is waiting to see him, and will wait till he has time to see her !"

And Aunt Sally entered the stuffy little parlor and sat down on the hard-hearted hair-cloth sofa. She had not long to wait. He came down at once, with a face so pale and desperate that her wrath entirely subsided.

"Miss Bowne !" he exclaimed : "What—has any thing happened ? Is any thing the matter ?"

"Yes, a good deal is the matter !" she replied, sternly. "You go to a girl who is worth a dozen of you, and tell her you love her, as you'd have told her weeks ago, if you could have forgotten about yourself, and your pride, and your poverty, and you only condescend to do it now, because you think she's lost all her money and you needn't step on your precious pride to come to her. And then, when you find you've been mistaken, and she hasn't lost her money, you write a cowardly note, that leaves her no choice in the matter, and pack your trunk and go to India !"

"She had not accepted me," he said, confusedly. "She asked me to wait for her answer."

"And do you suppose she'd have asked you to wait if she'd meant to refuse you ? That's a poor come-off ! And now do you look at yourself as if you were somebody else,

and see if the whole sum and substance of the matter isn't that you're afraid of what people will say about you. She didn't know I was coming to you ; she'll not die of it, if you go off and leave her this way ; she has too much sense for that ! But if you really cared for her as you professed to care, you wouldn't give her a five minutes' heart-ache. You musn't think you'll get away from yourself by going to India."

"It is true !" he said, despairingly. "It was for myself that I was afraid ! And if she cares for me, what does all the rest of the world matter ? But I am pledged to go. I can not draw back now. Oh, what shall I do ?"

"Come back with me, and beg her pardon, and make her understand why you wrote that note, and see if she'll give you a chance to prove whether you love her or not. And it will not matter if you go to India for a year, or two, or three years. You're both of you young enough, dear knows !"

He went. Aunt Sally's attack had swept away all his defenses, and made him see the coward's part he had been playing. And as they were on their way to the station that afternoon a brilliant piece of strategy occurred to the successful general. She had slipped a note under Muriel's door that morning in which she had said :

"You come to meet the afternoon train by yourself, my dear, in the phaeton, but be sure you take the old horse !"

And now she exclaimed :

"See here. Muriel was to meet me this afternoon with the phaeton, but you can just tell her that I made up my mind to go and spend the night with Miss Post, and she can come to the same train, to-morrow."

So when Neil Duncan sailed for India, the next Saturday, to be gone a year, it was with hopes which would make all labor seem light to him.

And while Muriel waited for the year to go by, she made each day of waiting a day of blessing, and her life grew daily fuller of activities for neglected and down-trodden bodies and souls. Pleasant things came to cheer her on her way ; Miss Post's restored sight, the warm affection of Lizzie Boyce, which would always act as a restraining power, over that volatile young person ; the steady growth in usefulness and power for good of her "station" in the warehouse, where, month by month, additions were made to the attractions of the place, and almost as frequently, to its capacity for holding those who were attracted.

And while she prayed that her earthly hopes might be fulfilled, it was no importunate prayer. She began to see how often the crushed hopes of one heart yield the wine of life for many others, and she stood humbly ready to serve, in sorrow or in joy, the Master in whose footsteps she was trying to walk.

THE END

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